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Men's Health

GET FITTER AT *ANY* AGE

Strong For Life

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DWAYNE JOHNSON
AKA THE ROCK
'SO HOW AM I FEELING ABOUT TURNING 50? I'M FEELING PRETTY GOOD'

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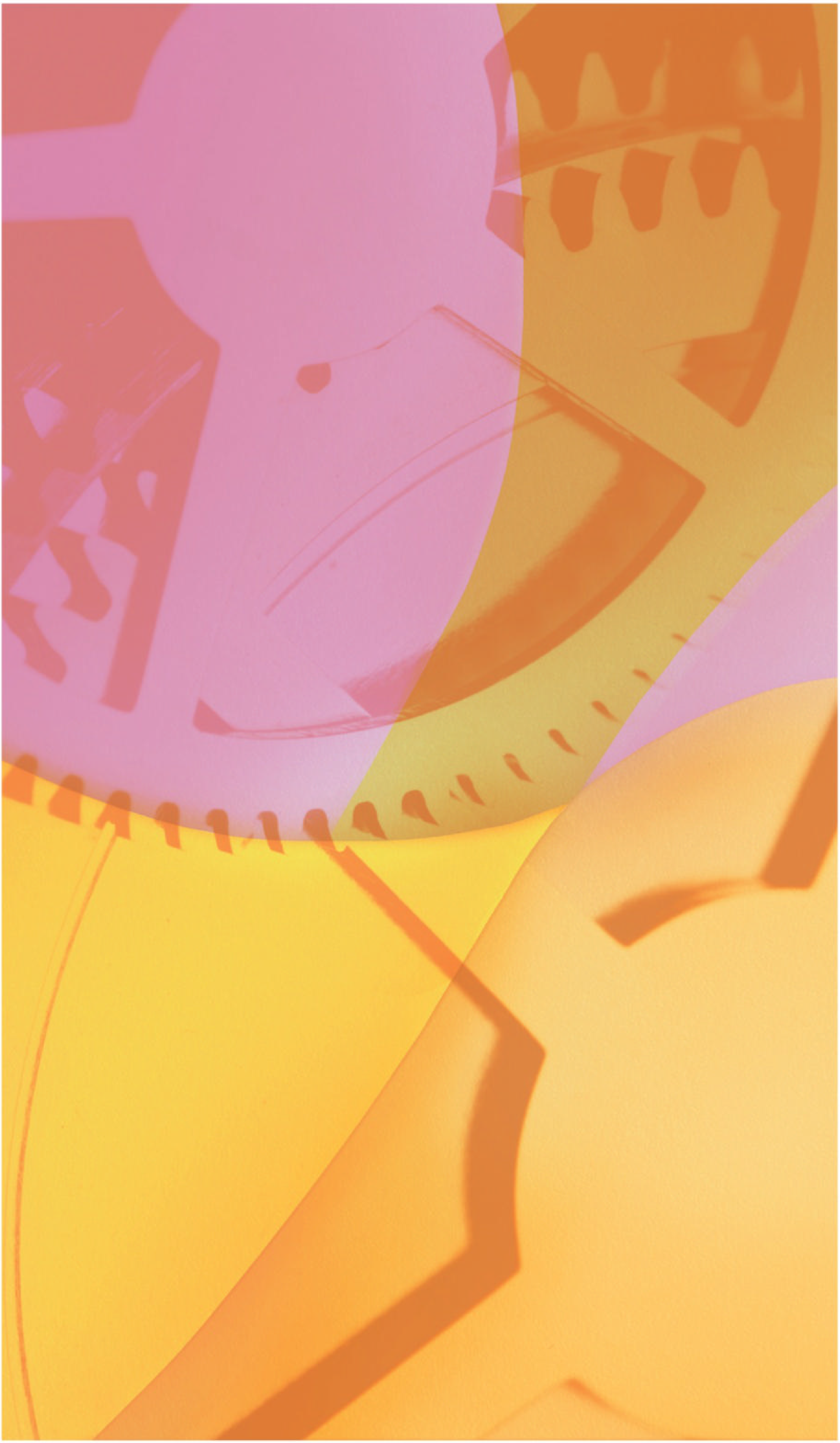

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01/23 START THE YEAR RIGHT

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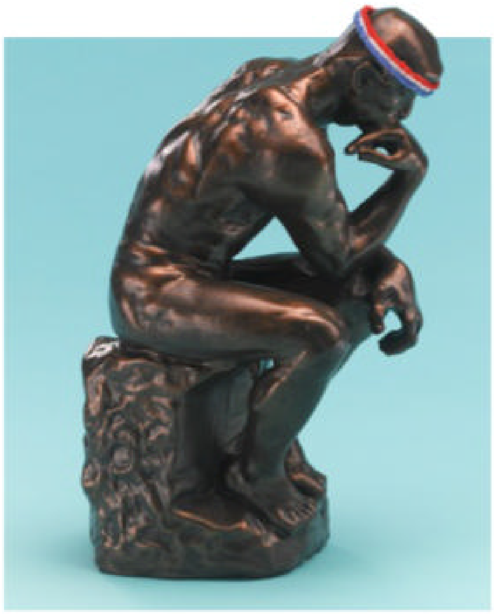

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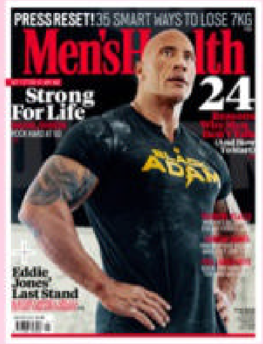
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SEAFOOD CHEF

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HOLLYWOOD ACTOR

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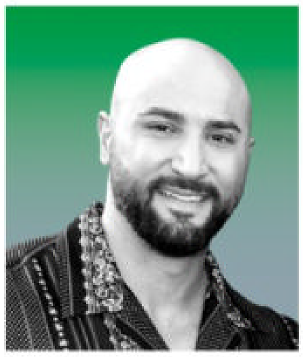
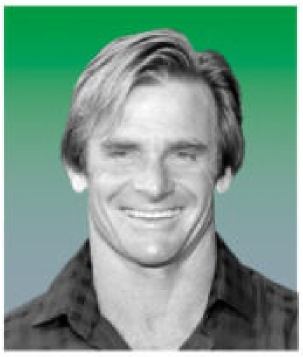


DAVE RIENZI

A-LIST TRAINER

As The Rock's PT of several years, Rienzi knows a thing or two about muscle. He talks *MH* through the kit he can't do without. p29



LAIRD HAMILTON

BIG-WAVE SURFER

A living legend of the surf world, Hamilton is still going strong at 58 and is as busy as ever. Take inspiration – and find a few tips – on p104

GREGORY SCOTT BROWN

PSYCHIATRIST

MH columnist Dr Brown knows that seeking help for mental health can be life-changing. He busts your excuses on p45

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- 5 NUTRITION CONSULTANTS
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- 2 ADDICTION SPECIALISTS
- 2 PSYCHIATRISTS
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- 1 FIT SEPTUAGENARIAN
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- 1 DAREDEVIL RUNNER
- 1 DEFIANT ENGLAND MANAGER
- 1 BIG-WAVE SURFER
- 1 ENLIGHTENED MEDITATOR
- AND THERE'S ONLY 1 ROCK

TOTAL 36 EXPERTS

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EDITOR'S LETTER

CHANGE ISN'T EASY. YOUR BEST SHOT IS GOOD ENOUGH

Every 12 months, when I sit down to write an editor's letter for *Men's Health*'s venerable Jan/Feb issue, I find myself coming unstuck. Which is ironic, in a way, because these things could happily write themselves.

Many would argue it's a case of new year, old hat. There's no time in the calendar when our collective thoughts, actions, hopes and despairs feel more scripted or formulaic than they do now. It's Christmas one minute, and then it's not. We binge, we feast, we regret, we repent. Accordingly, like fatted sheep, we oil the wheels of commerce that exist to sell us indulgence first, salvation second.

It's not lost on me that *Men's Health* is considered part of the machine. After all, it's also a time of year when health and fitness editorials are wont to read like motivational memes – or worse, the marketing gimmicks of snake-oil salesmen: 'Just remember, your life is an open book and only you can write the words that fill its pages...' It's enough to make you want to go back to bed with a Toblerone.

And yet, I admit to having trotted out similar sentiments on these pages. Never, I hope, going quite so far as telling people to trust the magic of new beginnings (boak). But telling readers they've got this, and that we've got them? Guilty.

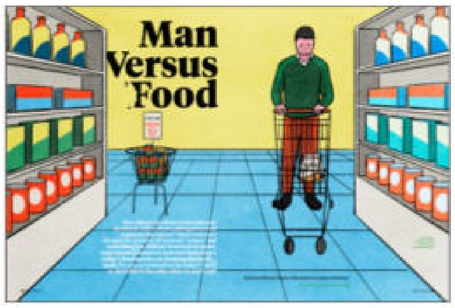
So for 2023's effort, I'm going to change tack a little.

First, I want to highlight some of the helpful, inspirational stories in this issue. You may have already been enticed by their coverlines. For those who've gorged themselves and are seeking to rebalance the scales, we have a comprehensive list of tools, tricks and tips designed to help you shed a surplus stone. Meanwhile, for readers who view the coming year as an ominous milestone of middle-age, there's our interview with Dwayne Johnson, aka The Rock, who describes recently turning 50 as hitting his 'fifth level'. The man is, no doubt, a specimen.

Second, I want to be honest about how I fit into this narrative. And this is the bit that might jar a little. Because the truth is it's not always plain sailing.

As I've mentioned before, being the editor of *Men's Health* doesn't discount me from being someone in need of the promises it offers. I've been open about not looking or feeling the way I'd like to at 46, plus my struggles – both mental and physical – to reconcile this. I eat and drink too much. For pleasure, yes, but for release/relief, too. I exercise frequently, and love sport, but don't enjoy hitting the weights like I should. I'm often intimidated by the prospect of gyms. I like to push myself, but generally alone, which is why I invariably run and cycle solo. And I do this, almost daily, even though I know it doesn't cancel out the wine I've drunk or the crisps I've eaten. It can become exhausting. But my point is this: I know exactly where I go wrong and what I should be doing right. It just doesn't make it any easier.

The Best Places
To Train In 2023



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SMART WAYS
TO LOSE
7KG
BY MARCH

Feel-
Good
HIITs

I'm also just as susceptible to the new year transformation schtick as the next man, regardless that January is an arbitrary month to start things, or that true wellbeing is a lifelong journey. Does this make me a fraud? I hope not. Yes, it feels odd to be laying myself bare, but despondency is not my intention. Rather, this is an attempt to throw a bone to anyone who approaches the idea of getting back in shape or pursuing a new challenge with doubt or hesitation.

So, for those who find the idea of joining a CrossFit box appealing, yet the reality foreboding, we have a feature dedicated to the UK's best places to train – a list of glitzy gyms and hardcore powerhouses alongside community-based, purpose-driven clubs, plus those offering alternative disciplines such as climbing and gymnastics. Moreover, for those who, like me, find themselves flitting between mindful eating and wanton Haribo binges, we have a fascinating and compassionate piece about men's increasingly complicated relationship with food. And for those who find that their minds are often at war with their bodies, may I suggest reading '24 Reasons Why Men Don't Talk About Their Mental Health (And Why They're All B*ll*cks)'.

It has long been my pledge to make *Men's Health* relevant to all men, pertaining to all areas of their health. That means catering to men of all ages and giving parity of esteem to the physical and mental. But I've come to realise it also means being there for men of assorted abilities, in diverse circumstances – and helping all of them succeed in their own way. Let us know how you think we're doing. We'd appreciate it.

And remember: 'the butterfly is proof that you can go through darkness yet become something beautiful'. Only joking. Just give it your best shot. It's good enough.

TOBY WISEMAN, EDITOR IN CHIEF

99X reasons for goosebumps.

We come from a family of racers, and are proudly carrying on their legacy. With our Porsche 99X Electric Gen3 we are living the dream of all-electric street racing. Now we are ready for the 9th season of the ABB FIA Formula E World Championship which will start on Saturday, 14 January 2023. We are the TAG Heuer Porsche Formula E Team – we Make It Matter. Join us on Instagram @porsche.formulae or Twitter @PorscheFormulaE.

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MUSCLE NEWSFEED 01/23

TURN MUSCLE GAIN ALL THE WAY UP TO 11

But not the way you'd expect. It turns out your cool-down playlist can have a potent effect on your gym progress

You don't need reminding that cranking up the volume of *Big Sesh Hype Tracks Vol 3* can enhance your physical performance. You've doubtless experienced the boost that a well-timed drop gives you when you're under a loaded barbell, helping you squeeze out an extra rep – or an extra 1.7, according to researchers at Samford University. Listening to music you enjoy reduces your perception of effort and even masks pain. But new research suggests that your routine is missing a vital support act.

Switch to a down-tempo playlist once you've finished and you can press play on the recovery process right away. During strenuous activity – such as one of our hard-hitting MH Squad workouts, for example – your body produces the stress hormone cortisol. This helps you generate more energy, so you can cope with the physical demands of exercise. But afterwards, too much cortisol can delay your muscles' repair phase. What you need, according to research from Brunel University, is soothing music to negate these effects.

Students were asked to cycle intensively for a short period, then pop on headphones during a gentle 30-minute recovery ride. While stimulating, high-tempo music proved to be worse than no music at all, 'reverse' tunes helped to lower subjects' heart rates quickly and avert the cortisol spike, allowing muscle repair to begin more quickly. It doesn't have to be whale sounds or panpipes, either: just say, 'Alexa, play chill playlist.' And let the gains begin.

LISTEN UP, COOL DOWN AND MAXIMISE YOUR GAINS

SLOW JAMS

Introduce these instantly calming cool-down tracks to your playlist to kick-start your recovery and aid muscle growth

Moments In Love
Art of Noise
138bpm

GROOVE ARMADA

At The River
Groove Armada
136bpm

MOBY
PORCELAIN

Porcelain
Moby
95bpm

MASSIVE ATTACK

Teardrop
Massive Attack
76bpm

Weightless
Marconi Union
71bpm

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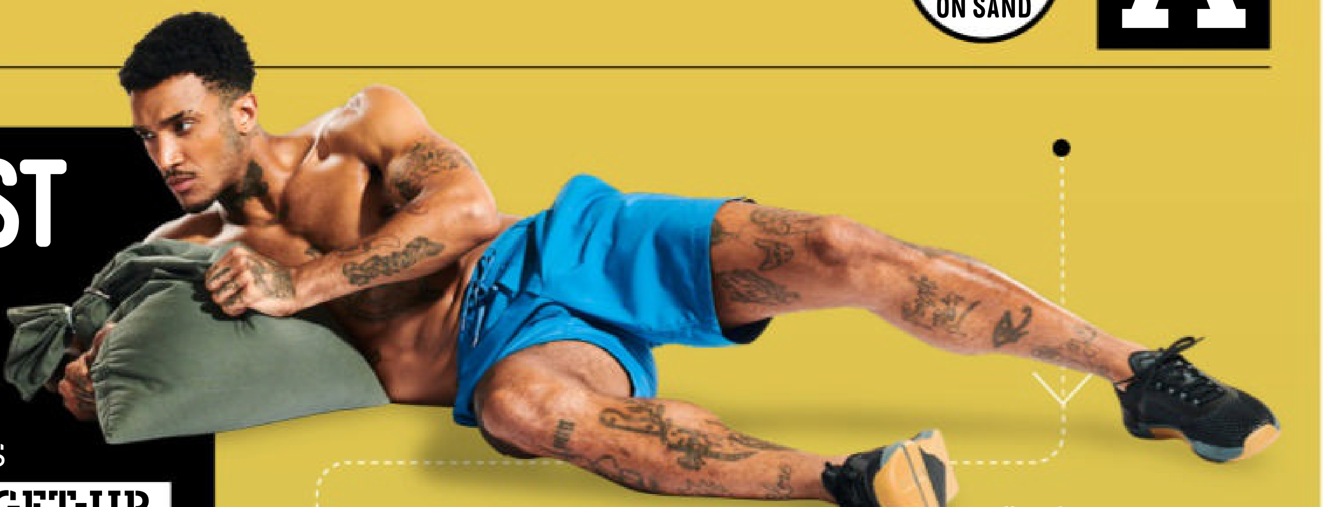
GROW AGAINST THE GRAINS

Want to hone new balance and total-body strength? It's hard to beat the **TURKISH GET-UP.** Throw in a sandbag for the extra 10%



The classic Turkish get-up is an exacting task that demands skill and a little bit of finesse. And that's fine – in fact, that's the point. Honing the required precision, rep by rep, is the key to reaping its full benefits.

Sometimes, however, you don't need precision – sometimes, you want a tussle, not a dance. That's where the sandbag get-up comes into its own. Trading a dumbbell or kettlebell for a shape-shifting object, the move channels many – if not all – of the benefits of its Turkish cousin through a brutish, awkward wrestle.

Importantly, there's no 'skill' to master here, no finesse, no 'right' or 'wrong' form; all you have to do is simply transition from lying belly-up on the floor to a standing position, with your sandbag in tow.

If you're looking to build raw strength, balance, proprioception and the type of rugged, full-body coordination that lends itself to everything from repping out chin-ups to chopping down trees, this is a key movement that needs to be in your arsenal.

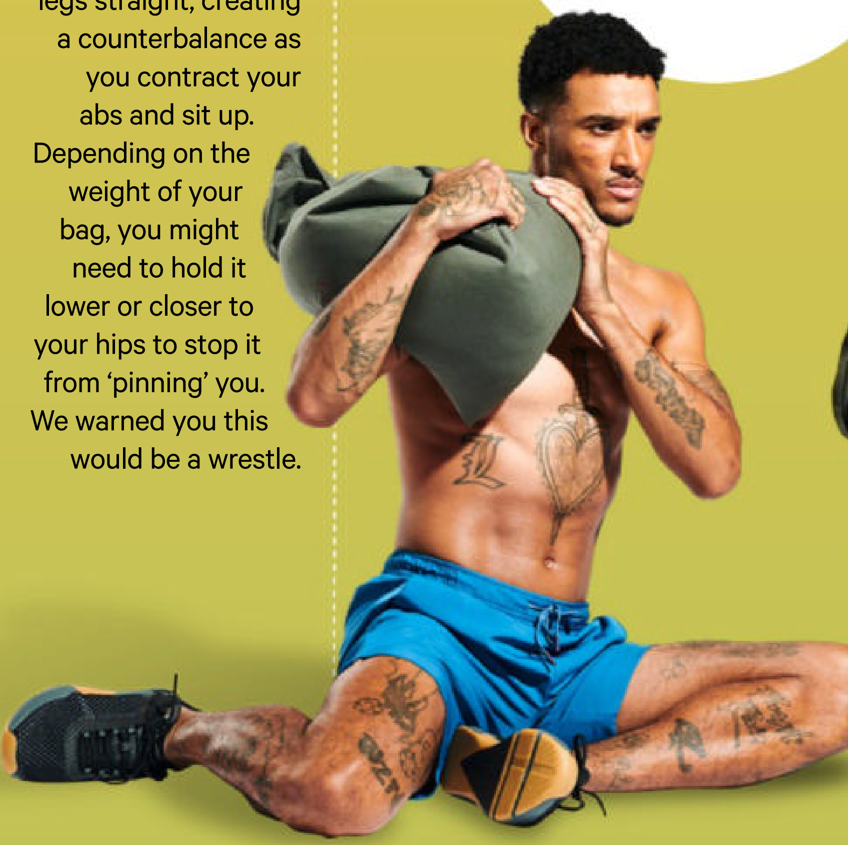
THE BEST EXERCISE YOU'RE NOT DOING

01
LAID OUT

Begin on the floor, lying flat on your back, your bag to one side. Turn and grab the bag with both arms, pulling it to your chest, abs or shoulders. (Find the position that works best for you.) Roll back into a lying position, with the bag held tight.

02
SIT UP

Dig your heels into the ground but keep your legs straight, creating a counterbalance as you contract your abs and sit up. Depending on the weight of your bag, you might need to hold it lower or closer to your hips to stop it from 'pinning' you. We warned you this would be a wrestle.

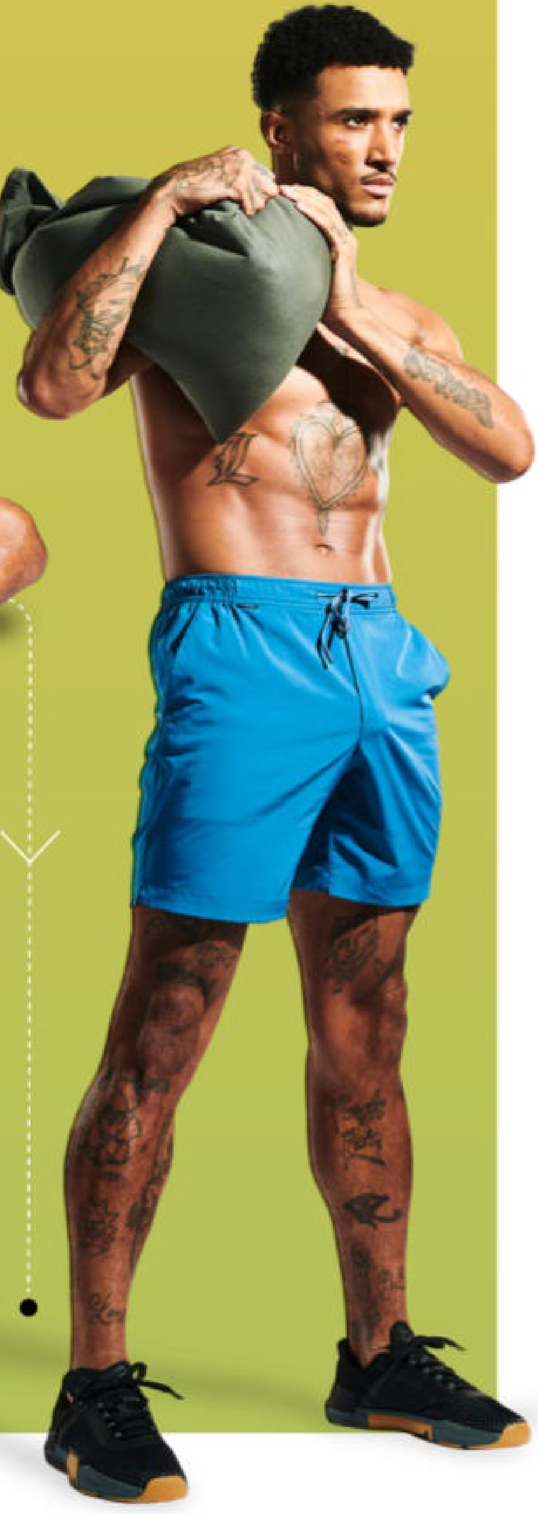


03
MOVE ON

Bring your left heel towards your body, your right knee towards your left heel and your right heel towards your glutes, ensuring your thighs and calves are flat to the ground. From this position, shift your weight forwards and lift your hips. Finish in a tall kneeling posture.

04
STAND TALL

Lift your right knee and step your foot forwards. From this lunge position, lean forwards. Push through the floor, lifting your back foot in line with your right and standing. Roll the bag on to your shoulder to finish the rep, then reverse the move all the way down.



WHAT YOU'LL GAIN

A BALANCED PHYSIQUE + COBBLESTONE ABDOMINALS + ROCK-SOLID STABILITY

WORDS: ANDREW TRACEY. PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP HAYNES. MODEL: LEWIS AKPATA AT W MODEL. STYLING: ABENA OFEI. GROOMING: NAT SCHMITT USING CLARINS FOR MEN. CLOTHING: SHORTS, MR MARVIS; TRAINERS, REEBOK

THE NUTRITION SNOB'S GUIDE TO

TINNED FISH

Once an austere pantry staple, tinned fish has earned high-end status for its umami flavours and omega-3 oils. Let's get cracking

01 CATCH OF THE DAY

Canning is a centuries-old practice in Spain and Portugal that gets a bad rap in the UK due to its links with WW2 rationing. Where once canning was done on a mass scale, it's having a revival thanks to new approaches such as reimagined cooking techniques and a focus on British fish, says Mitch Tonks, owner of Rockfish restaurant. Here's our top haul.

A CUTTLEFISH

Part of the same family as squid, protein-rich cuttlefish is often canned in a sauce made from its own ink, adding a salty element to its almost creamy flesh. Great at absorbing strong flavours, including punchy tomato sauces or garlic and olives.

FILETES DE CAVALA EM AZEITE

B MACKEREL

Plump, oily and flaky, it's an easy sub-in for tuna, and a great source of vitamin D and healthy fats. There are many excellent European brands, but it's also one of the best fish you can get locally. Try fish caught from the Scottish coast or Devon.

ORTIZ
SARDINAS A LA ANTIGUA
El Velero

C SARDINES

Unlike mackerel, tinned sardines have their bones in (extra calcium), but the canning process breaks them down so they're barely noticeable. They have a less meaty mouthfeel and a more intense flavour. Try frying in a hot pan so they crisp up.

MEJILLONES
SALSA ESPAÑOLA

D MUSSELS

If you're anxious about cooking fresh mussels at home, why not opt for tinned instead? Tonks says the soft meatiness pairs well with sharp, crunchy vegetables, such as thinly sliced fennel or red onion. They're a good source of iron and vit B12, too.

02 INSIDE SECRETS

Forget what you think you know: not all processed foods are without merit. 'Like charcuterie or any preservational craft, canning becomes a magical thing when you give it to people who know what they're doing,' says Tonks. Research shows the canning process preserves the most important nutrients.

The simplicity of cooking with tinned fish means it's hard to go wrong – just drain and add to salads/pasta/a hot pan. There are a few rules. Don't buy cheap, says Tonks. It's still fish, and a lower price indicates poorer quality. Tonks suggests swapping water-packed fish for those in oil, which are 'more flavoursome'.

It's true that some of your seafood's omega-3 can end up in its canning oil. But that's no bad thing if you're making use of it. Reserved oil can be used to sweat aromatics in a pasta dish, whisked into egg yolks to make a mayonnaise or mixed with vinegar to make a punchy dressing.

WORDS: CHRIS MANDLE. PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL HEDGE.
FOOD STYLING: IONA BLACKSHAW

03

CRACK ONE OPEN

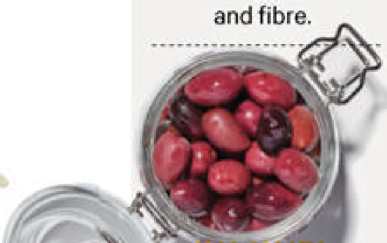
Different fish lend themselves to different dishes. Meatier fillets hold their own against Middle-Eastern spices, while creamy-fleshed squid can absorb the fiery heat of 'nduja . Try one of these recipes from Tonks.

JAR POWER

Three more long-life foods to add to your shopping list

ARTICHOKE HEARTS

This pasta-friendly plant (technically a thistle) is rich in folate, vitamin K and fibre.



KALAMATA OLIVES

Their oleic acid can help to lower blood pressure, as well as being linked to reduced weight gain.

PEPPADEWS

Pickled in a sweet-sour brine that preserves these peppers' high levels of vit C (half your RDA per serving).

A

CUTTLEFISH WITH CREAMY POLENTA

SERVES 2

- 1 tin of cuttlefish
- 1 packet of polenta
- Butter, to taste

METHOD

A Venetian dish that's pleasingly simple. First make the polenta. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil, then slowly pour in the polenta, whisking constantly. Once there are no lumps, reduce the heat and simmer for 5 mins, still whisking. You can add butter, pepper, cheese and aromatics to taste. Add the cuttlefish with its juices into a pan and heat through, before spooning on top of the polenta.

B

TINNED MACKEREL SHAWARMA

SERVES 2

- ½ cabbage
- 1 red onion
- 1 green chilli
- 1 garlic clove
- 2 tbsp yoghurt
- 4 flour tortillas
- 2 tbsp hummus
- 1 tin of mackerel
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Za'atar and pomegranate seeds to garnish

METHOD

Try this for a big hit of fibre. Finely shred the cabbage, slice the red onion and green chilli, then mix in a small bowl. Grate the garlic into the yoghurt before tossing it with the vegetables. Spread hummus across tortillas or flatbreads, place the cabbage mixture on top, then finish with the omega-rich mackerel. Sprinkle with za'atar (or cumin seeds), a squeeze of lemon and pomegranate seeds, then wrap up.

C

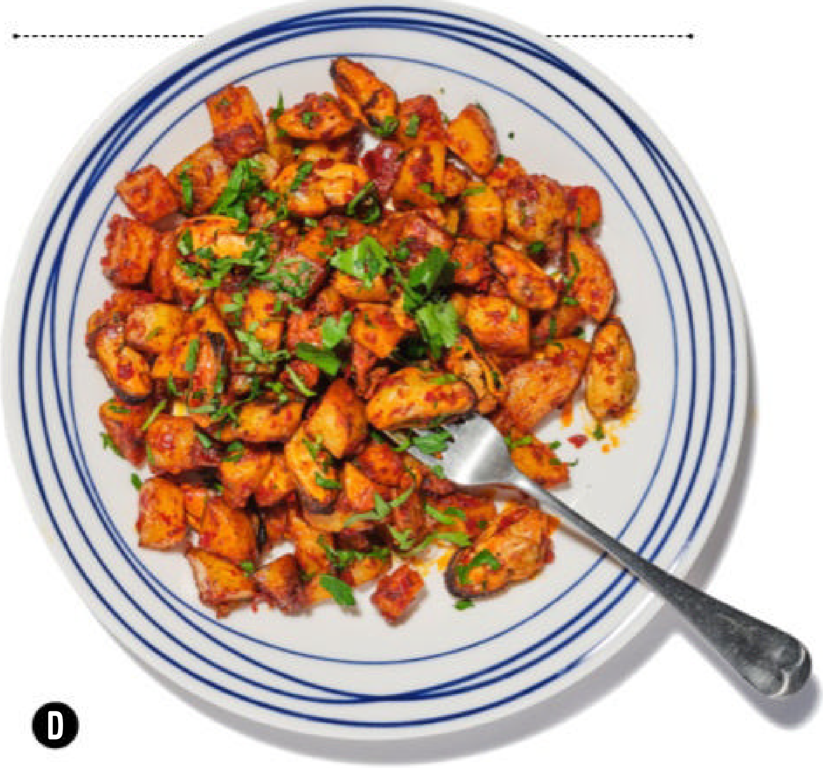
SARDINE SOM TAM SALAD

SERVES 2

- 2 carrots
- 1 courgette
- 1 red onion
- Cherry tomatoes
- 1 chilli, sliced
- 1 tsp light brown sugar
- Dash of fish sauce
- Juice of 1 lime
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 tin of sardines

METHOD

Shred the carrots and courgette (green papaya would also work, and is more traditional) into juliennes. Thinly slice a red onion and halve the tomatoes, place in a bowl with a few slices of red chilli. Combine the sugar, fish sauce, lime juice and bashed garlic for the dressing. Dress the salad, adding fresh coriander and mint, and mix. Fry the sardines in hot oil until crisp, fold through the salad and serve.



D

MUSSELS WITH 'NDUJA AND CRISPY POTATOES

SERVES 4

- Handful of new potatoes
- 2 tbsp 'nduja
- 1 tin of mussels
- Handful of fresh parsley

METHOD

Dice the potatoes into small cubes (the smaller they are, the quicker they cook). Heat the 'nduja in a frying pan on a medium heat to release the oils, then add the potatoes with a glug of olive oil and cook until the potatoes begin to crisp. White spuds are unfairly maligned for their quick-acting carbs, but adding protein slows the glucose release. Add the mussels to the pan to warm through and parsley to finish.

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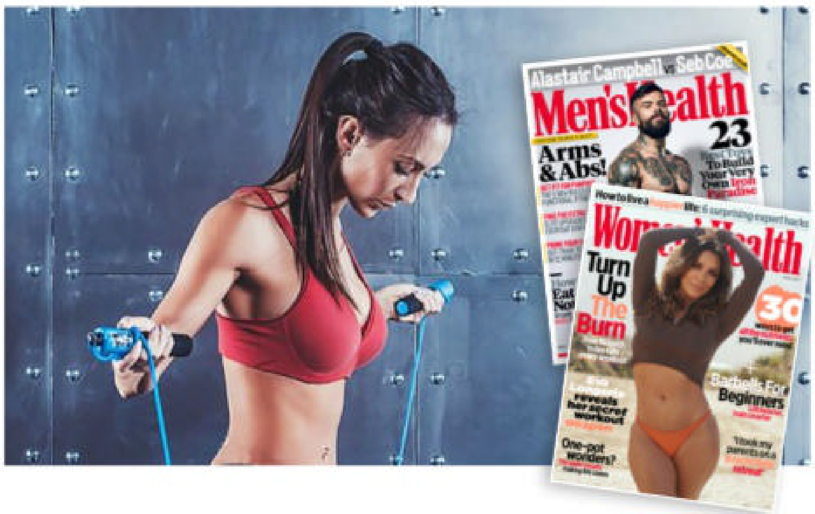
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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN...

...I SWITCH TO E-CIGARETTES?

Vaping continues to rise in popularity, but is it really the safe way to puff? Or does no smoke actually mean fire?

01
02
03
04
05
N

IS VAPING ANOTHER HABIT YOU SHOULD STUB OUT FOR GOOD?

01

FIRE WITH LESS ALARM

Regular smoking releases nicotine and other chemicals that we suck down into our lungs by burning tobacco. Vapes mimic the sensation but bypass the harmful combustion. E-cigs heat liquids containing nicotine, which still triggers the release of dopamine, only with fewer nasty chemicals. 'In the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the health risks of smoking,' says Erikas Simonavičius, research associate at the Nicotine Research group, King's College London.

02

CHEMICAL BOTHERS

Vaping exposes you to as many as 2,000 chemicals, including propylene glycol and/or vegetable glycerine. But that's far fewer toxicants than found among the 7,000 chemicals in tobacco smoke, at least 250 of which are known carcinogens, such as tar, benzene, arsenic and formaldehyde. 'Vaping includes some of the same stuff [as cigarettes], but at substantially lower levels,' says Dr Simonavičius.

03

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

The hit of nicotine varies between different vaping models. Heavy smokers trying to quit might find the larger tank-type devices better as they deliver nicotine faster, in higher doses to more effectively feed cravings. For non-addicted vapers, however, the opposite is true. 'How quickly nicotine hooks people is closely linked to the speed at which it is delivered to the brain,' says Ann McNeill, professor of tobacco addiction at King's College London.

04

CHEW IT OVER

Isn't nicotine still bad? Well, its reputation is getting a bit of rehab. There's some evidence it might even improve performance. 'Nicotine in general is similar to caffeine,' says Dr Simonavičius. 'Some studies show that nicotine use might improve cognitive function and movement.' That includes one small study that found chewing a low-dose (2mg) gum 20 minutes prior to exercise significantly improved leg extensor torque – aka muscle strength.

05

DON'T START

As for the risks of vaping? Long-term evidence is lacking simply because vaping is still relatively new, says Dr Simonavičius. 'Plus most vapers are past smokers, so it's difficult to disentangle the health effects of past smoking from vaping.' Most reports of vape-related lung injury are linked to use of psychoactive THC or vitamin E additives. But, for now, the facts remain hazy.

WORDS: KIERAN ALGER. ILLUSTRATION: PETER GRUNDY

AGED 70, LANG KNOWS THE WEIGHT HIS FRAME CARRIES BEST

STRIKE BACK AT EXPECTATIONS

He may be entering his eighth decade, but a mix of martial arts, yoga and weight-training keeps Stephen Lang, *Avatar*'s sadistic Colonel Quaritch, in fighting shape

A pair of dumbbells sit in a corner of the cramped basement room that Stephen Lang calls his gym, and 4.5kg plates are strewn across the floor. Lang stands in the centre of the room, grinning broadly. 'This,' he says, 'is where I do the bulk of my workouts.'

Never mind that the space is so tiny that when Lang raises his arms, he nearly grazes the walls. The 70-year-old actor, best known for playing Colonel Quaritch in 2009's *Avatar*, grabs a wrist roller from the floor. It's a simple tool (he loves DIY fitness gear): a stick with a weight attached by a piece of rope. Holding it in both hands, he extends his arms, flexing his wrists one after the other, rolling the weight towards the stick and doing several reps. 'At this point in my life,' he says, 'what's important to me is flexibility, stamina and strength. And I've added one other thing to that, which is alignment.'

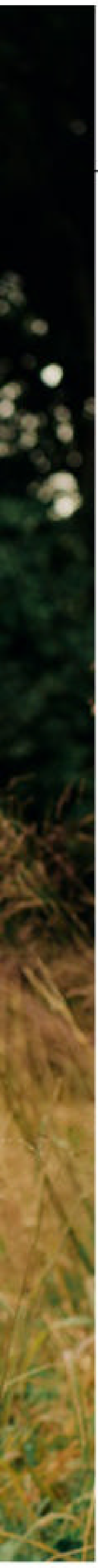
To achieve this, he trains at least four days a week, doing yoga, weight-training and karate workouts he's perfected over the past 12 years. Some days, he'll do all three, but he gives precedence to yoga. This regimen is a key reason he still looks menacing as Colonel Quaritch in *Avatar: The Way Of Water*, out now.

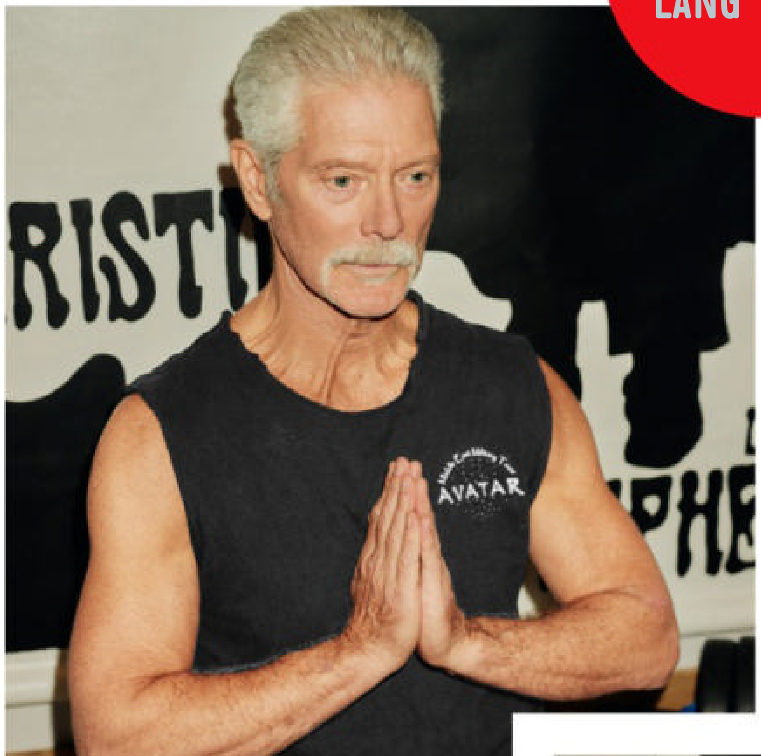
He hints that he's in better shape today than he was in the original film. He weighed 13st 8lb then, thanks to plenty of old-school weight-training sessions. But this didn't make his body feel good, so, a year after *Avatar*, he changed his style. He's 11st 1lb now but says his frame carries this load 'much more comfortably'. 'I'd date it at 2010 when I became committed for the rest of my life to remain as fit and as flexible as I can,' he says. 'You become aware of your advancing age; you feel your age. And it's not a question of staving off age. You can't do that. But what you can do is make the most out of what you got.'

> 'You can't stave off age – but you can make the most of what you've got'

And this workout does that – especially today, with all three of his disciplines combined into one

6AM WITH... STEPHEN LANG





session. Lang exits the room, then drops into a press-up, completing 11 reps (his superstition) so easily that you almost don't notice he's supporting his upper body with his fingertips, a gruelling technique he learned in karate.

After several sets, he's back in his 'gym'. Now, he's balancing on his left leg, right foot pinned to left thigh, doing a tree pose. But instead of clasping his hands together overhead, he holds tiny vice grips in each hand, squeezing each to challenge his forearms. 'They're somewhat oppositional,' he says of his top training styles. 'But there's a sweet spot where they really come together.'

Indeed, the blend of ideas has helped him build muscle and ward off pain. He battles arthritis in his hands and had a left hip replacement in 2014, but he still shifts into fingertip press-ups and a fighter's stance to work through the kata, a classic karate flow.

It all helps him move and feel better – while leaving room for the fun of biceps curls. As the session ends, he grabs a weight, crouches and presses his triceps into his thigh, then rips through a round of concentration curls. 'I also [train], quite frankly, out of vanity,' he says. Hey, whatever motivation works.

WORDS: MARK LELINWALLA. PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFF ALLEN.
ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP HAYNES; GETTY IMAGES

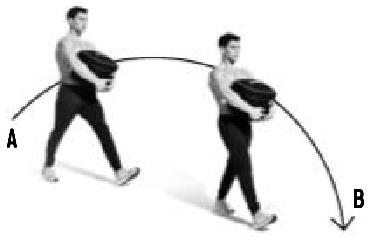
BETWEEN SETS

From pizza to postures, here's the low-down on Lang's likes

FITNESS IDOL?	FAVOURITE EXERCISE?	PERFECT CHEAT MEAL?
Well, I love Charles Bronson, just the way he moved, the way he did stuff. Originally, it was Jack LaLanne. I'd be watching, and there was something so sparky about him.	I love rabbit pose. It's a yoga posture. You come out of it and go, 'Whooo!' But I also really like concentration curls.	I never use the term cheating. I think you earn those meals. But it'd definitely be pizza. I love pizza: I'll take Chicago, Detroit, Boston, New Haven, New York.

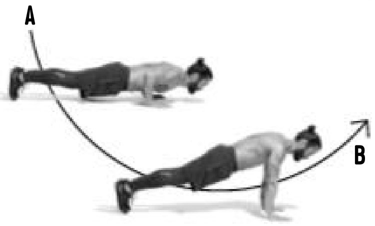
DIY YOUR FITNESS

No weights? Get creative with your body weight and any gear you can find. Try Lang's three favourite any time-anywhere moves



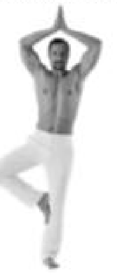
01 / LOADED CARRY

No sandbag? Grab a large bucket and fill it with bricks – or anything of your choosing.



02 / PRESS-UP

Old reliable. Do 10 reps. Too easy? Try placing only your fingertips on the floor; now do 10. Do 3 or 4 sets.



03 / TREE POSE

Bend your right knee and dig your foot into your left thigh. Raise your hands overhead. Hold for 30 secs.

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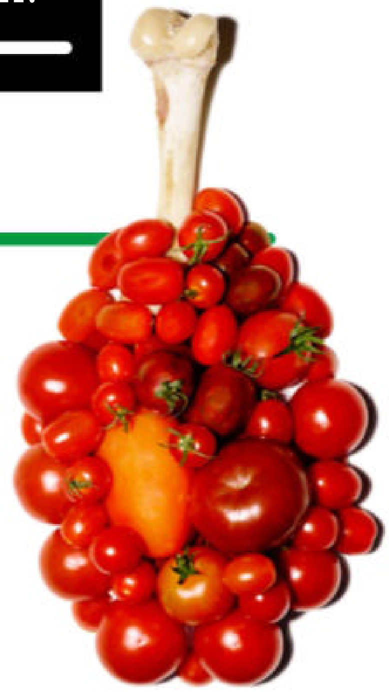
MH VERSUS
CARNIVORE VS HERBIVORE

HUNT OR GATHER?

An estimated five million people will participate in Veganuary this year. But is cutting meat or carbs the surer path to health?



CARNIVORE

VS

HERBIVORE

7%

The proportion of UK men who have attempted to stick to a low-carbohydrate diet, with weight loss the chief driving force

46%

The percentage of Brits who have bought meat alternatives motivated by a desire to improve their health

Carnivore		Herbivore
Diets high in beef, lamb, pork and processed meats are thought to increase the risk of bowel cancer. Stick to 500g a week and pair with fibrous veg.	**RISK FACTORS**	Vegans are more prone to bone fractures, according to University of Oxford researchers. Fuel up with calcium-rich leafy greens, plant milks and tofu.
18.5g The grams of protein in 100g of 20% fat minced beef. This compares to the 9g of protein in a similarly sized portion of common mince sub-in, lentils.	**PROTEIN POWER**	**20p** The cost of 100g of red lentils, compared with 55p for your beef mince. Done smartly, some studies suggest veganism can reduce food bills by a third.
Omega-3 injection Provides vitamin D Useful B vitamins Top source of iron	**PODIERPLEARKS**	Plenty of minerals Packed with fibre Easy protein top-up Full of good fats
2.3kg Amount lost in two weeks by overweight men on a high-protein, meat-based plan, Scottish scientists found. However, those who subbed it for soya lost 140g more…	**WEIGHT WATCHER**	**7.5%** The average body weight lost by a group of vegans in six months, according to a *Nutrition* journal study. Other diet groups studied slimmed at a slower rate.
In one *Nutrients* journal study of 19 people, those on a high-fat, low-carb diet reduced their body fat but struggled to put on muscle mass compared with higher-carb eaters.	**MUSCLE MATHS**	It's total grams, not protein source, that impacts strength and mass, says a University of São Paulo study, which found vegan and meat diets deliver similar gains.

MH VERDICT: VEGAN WINS!

Both meaty and plant-based eating styles can deliver benefits, but veganism just edges it for health boons. But whichever plan you pick, whole foods remain the order of the day.

WORDS: CHARLIE METCALFE. PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL HEDGE; LUCKY IF SHARP. DIGITAL MANIPULATION: SCRATCHINPOST.CO.UK

A DRINKER'S GUIDE TO NOT DRINKING

Whether you're embarking on Dry Jan or just want to make some cutbacks, drinks writer Richard Godwin has a few good ideas to help the process go down smoothly

Not so long ago, a man who announced he was observing Dry January (or Sober October, Parched March, No-Bender November, etc) was a man who opened himself up to mockery.

Thank goodness this has changed – and I say that as someone who writes about booze for a living. There is an increasingly wide acceptance that giving up alcohol doesn't have to be all or nothing. Personally, I can't contemplate a completely Martini-free life – but I do go without for long spells when I can. The cool, distraction-free expanses of January are as good a time as any to cultivate a clear head.

Meanwhile, the drinks industry has cottoned on to the existence of these millions of non-drinkers (and the money that can be made from them). The result is a spectrum of no- and low-alcohol options that don't feel like an afterthought. Some are overpriced. Some are disappointing. But many are so good, they eclipse their boozemates. Here are some of my favourites.

01

THE WHITE

Oddbird Low Intervention Organic White No. 1 (0% ABV) Sweden's Oddbird has developed a small cult around its 'low-intervention' wines. The flagship white is made from garganega and vespaiola grapes from Italy's Veneto region, aged for 12 months. It tastes like pears and honey, which give way to a long, savoury finish.

02

THE CRAFT BEER

Big Drop Pine Trail Pale Ale (0.5% ABV) Big Drop is a non-alcoholic pioneer with an ever-evolving array of IPAs, stouts, lagers, brown ales, you name it. The award-winning pale ale is the pick of the bunch: bright, herby and bracing, like you're strolling through an evergreen forest on a Californian clifftop.

03

THE LAGER

Lucky Saint Unfiltered Lager (0.5% ABV) I've long since tired of over-hoppy, over-sweet craft beers and have been on a mission to locate the perfect pilsner. It's Lucky Saint, curiously, that comes closest to the ideal: crisp, dry, malty, moreish, only without the alcohol content. You miss it much less than you'd think.

04

THE CIDER

Maison Sassy Organic Cider (0% ABV) Situated in the heart of Normandy, Maison Sassy makes a stellar range of ciders in the classic French brut style. The '0.0%' is clean and complex, with that delectable, dry farmyard note at the end; the perfect addition to a big plate of crepes.

01
02
03
04
LIBERATED FROM ALCOHOL
ODDBIRD
BIG DROP BREWING CO.
PINE TRAIL PALE ALE
ALCOHOL-FREE
LUCKY SAINT
0.0%
SASSY

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROWAN FEE

05

THE RED

L'Antidote Petillant Jus Et Plantes (0% ABV) Most non-alcoholic red wines range from depressing to passable. But maybe we're overthinking it? Left unfermented, red grape juice can be heavenly. Single-estate juices are a growing niche among forward-thinking wine producers and this sparkling Beaujolais blend with 15 herbs is a proper charmer.

06

THE APERITIF

Crodino Biondo (0% ABV) Aperitivo hour is, as every Italian knows, the best time of the day. And it's easy to switch your negroni for the Crodino, an Italian deli staple now widely available in the UK. Bittersweet, spicy and citrusy, mix with kombucha and serve with a lemon slice and a plump nocellara olive.

07

THE READY-TO-DRINK

Longbottom & Co Virgin Mary (0% ABV) The Bloody Mary is a rare cocktail that is just as nice without the alcohol. The rather bougie Longbottom & Co recipe contains olives, horseradish, capers and scotch bonnets, and it really does piece you back together again.

08

THE SPIRIT

Three Spirit Livener (0% ABV) Three Spirit creates 'adaptogenic' drinks that don't try to imitate existing spirit categories but cast out in bold new directions. I like the Livener, a herbal blend featuring guayusa, schisandra and ginseng. The makers suggest you mix it with kombucha, but I found hot water and a lemon twist a better winter match.

09

THE KOMBUCHA

Real Royal Flush (0% ABV) For my money, kombucha (fermented tea) is the best non-alcoholic option, partly because it's not trying to be something it isn't. Unlike a lot of brands, Real leans on the taste of tea rather than fruit flavours. Try the Darjeeling blend for something that's complex and moreish.

05
06
07
08
09
L'ANTIDOTE
75CL
CRODINO
BIONDO
LONGBOTTOM & Cº
VIRGIN MARY
BOTANICAL ALCHEMY
THREE SPIRIT
Livener
NON-ALCOHOLIC
50 CL
REAL
SPARKLING TEA
ROYAL FLUSH

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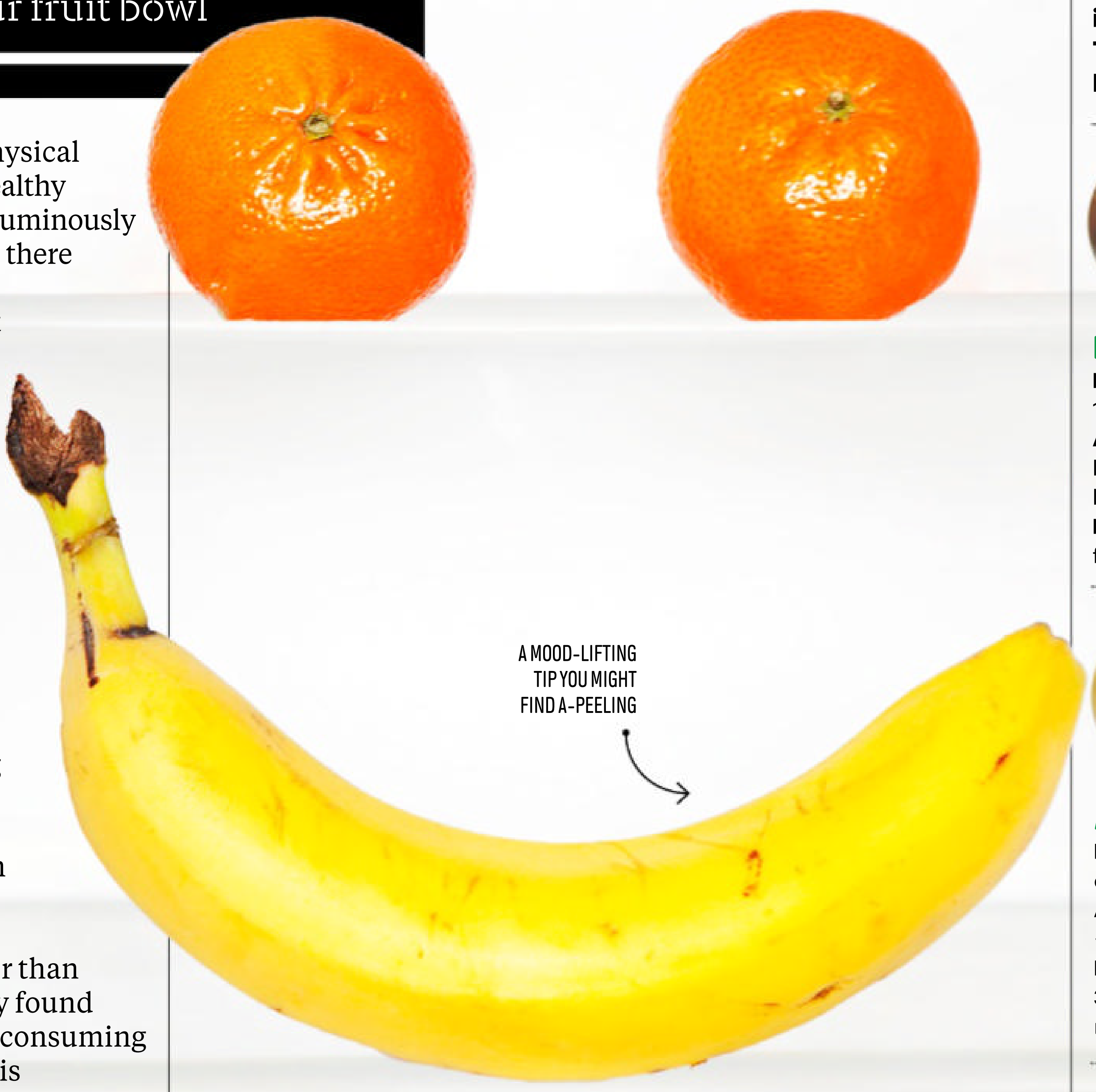
MAKE DARK DAYS A LITTLE SWEETER

Ignore the new-year food fads: the quickest, most affordable way to take a bite out of the winter blues can be found in your fruit bowl



Though the physical benefits of healthy eating are voluminously documented, there is surprisingly little known about how diet affects your mental wellbeing. Yes, chillies give you an endorphin rush and a sugar high almost invariably ends with a crash – but what of food's effects on your longer-term mental health? And as you contend with the customary new-year anxieties of returning to work, how do you fuel your positivity?

According to a team of researchers from Birmingham's Aston University, it's simpler than you might think. They found that while frequently consuming nutrient-poor snacks is associated with reductions in psychological health, those who stave off hunger with ordinary fruit tend to have significantly better mental wellbeing than those who don't.

A crucial detail of their study, which surveyed the eating habits of 428 adults from across the UK, is that how often you dip into the fruit bowl is more important than the total amount you eat. That means bingeing on a supermarket tub of melon chunks is less effective than, say, swapping your mid-afternoon bag of Monster Munch for an apple. Regularity is key.

Also important is that veg doesn't seem to have a comparable effect, despite being similarly rich in fibre, antioxidants and micronutrients. The researchers speculate that this is because we tend to cook them, diminishing their nutrient payload, while we eat almost all of our fruit raw.

Don't consider yourself much of a fan? Then shake up your expectations with one of our alternative fruit bowl recipes.

PIC 'N' MIX RECIPES

Mash the base ingredients with a cocktail muddler in a large bowl for 30 secs. Toss with the add-ins and let it rest for 15 mins. Top with the kicker. Each serves 4.

PLUM PUDDING

BASE: 4 tsp sugar + 1 tbsp grated fresh ginger
ADD-INS: 250g red or black grapes + 250g blueberries + 350g plums
KICKER: 30g almond flakes + 2 tbsp lemon juice

APPLE CRUMBLE

BASE: 3 tsp sugar + ½ tsp each cinnamon + ginger
ADD-INS: 2 to 3 apples + 300g blackberries
KICKER: 80g granola + 30g walnuts + 1 tbsp each maple syrup + Greek yog

RASPBERRY RIPPLE

BASE: 4 tsp sugar + 2 tsp lemon zest
ADD-INS: 250g raspberries + 350g apricots + 2 small bananas
KICKER: 30g dark chocolate + 30g halved or crushed hazelnuts

WORDS: YO ZUSHI. PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: DANIELLE DALY. FOOD STYLING: SIMON ANDREWS

RUNNER'S WORLD
CRIB GOCH RIDGE, SNOWDON

REACH YOUR PEAK

Raise the stakes and take your outdoor adventures to fresh heights by tackling one of the world's toughest mountain run routes

THE LOCATION
The hardest route to the summit of Snowdon in north-west Wales, Crib Goch is not for the faint of heart – nor is it for the inexperienced mountaineer. The terrain is extreme, some of it off-path. Your weekend trail run, this ain't.

THE RACE
Tackle it via the Montane Dragon's Back Race, a six-day event in which competitors cover 380km with 17,400m of climb, as they move south along the spine of Wales. Day one features 3,800m of ascent, including the knife-edge Crib Goch ridge. Finish the full route at Cardiff Castle.

THE RUNNER
Konrad Rawlik (pictured) was the fourth-fastest runner at the 2019 event. In the 2022 event, just 102 of the 263 runners completed the course, with the winner clocking in at 50 hours, 40 minutes and 23 seconds. For more information, visit *dragonsbackrace.com*

WORDS: *RUNNER'S WORLD*. PHOTOGRAPHY: ©MONTANE DRAGON'S BACK RACE/NO LIMITS PHOTOGRAPHY

14
THE BIG
STEEP

LOCATION

53.0685° N,
4.0763° W

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WHAT'S IN YOUR LOCKER? DAVID RIENZI

FITNESS GEAR THAT ROCKS

Elite trainer **David Rienzi** is the man responsible for Dwayne Johnson's *Black Adam* physique. Here's the kit he trusts

01
PSO-RITE PSOAS MASSAGE TOOL

While training for **Black Adam,** Rienzi and Johnson used this tool before leg and back workouts. 'The psoas [found deep in the lower lumbar region of the spine] is a tricky muscle. Sometimes you need manual therapy to really release it.'
£131.51, amazon.co.uk

02
MEN'S UA TRIBASE REIGN 4 PRO

'If I'm looking for a low-profile shoe, this one's fantastic,' Rienzi says. 'It has a 2mm heel drop, which makes it great for leg days.'
£130, underarmour.com

03
ZOA+ ENERGY DRINK

Zoa co-founder Rienzi swears by its benefits. 'Other pre-workouts give you energy fast and you crash hard. This is a sustained energy that lasts past the workout, so there's no crash.'
£51 for 12, u-buy.co.uk

04
EMBER MUG2

As a big coffee drinker, Rienzi takes this hi-tech mug wherever he goes. 'It keeps your coffee heated to a certain temperature, and it's such a game changer,' he says. 'It's hard to go back to drinking out of a regular mug.'
£119.95, apple.com/uk

05
GILLETTE LABS HEATED RAZOR STARTER KIT

Whether he's shaving his head or his face, Rienzi uses Gillette's heated razor to get the job done. 'It gives such a close shave and feels fantastic. 'I don't get any bumps or irritation from it.'
£124.99, gillette.co.uk

DAVID RIENZI
The Rock's S&C coach of several years, Rienzi knows the secrets to a superheroic transformation.

06
FIREWIRE SEASIDE SURFBOARD

Rienzi took up surfing again seven years ago, but it's been difficult to track down a board that can accommodate his 15st 10lb build. 'Finding this one took a lot of trial and error. It has the right amount of volume and float for my weight, but also has manoeuvrability.'
£725, boardshop.co.uk

06
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SEASIDE
MACHADO
ANTIOXIDANTS + VITAMINS C E
ZOA+
NITRIC OXIDE
SUPPORT
PRE-WORKOUT
ENERGY
SUPPLEMENT
200mg NATURAL CAFFEINE
0 SUGAR AND PRESERVATIVES
NATURALLY FLAVORED
BLACKBERRY ACAI
DIETARY SUPPLEMENT
ember

WORDS: CHRISTIAN GOLLAYAN. PHOTOGRAPHY: MIGUEL CORTES; COURTESY BRANDS

THE BIG QUESTION

I ALWAYS RENEGE ON MY JANUARY FITNESS RESOLUTIONS. HOW CAN I MAKE THIS YEAR DIFFERENT?

Antoni, Milton Keynes

First, you're not alone. Exercising more and losing weight are among the most common New Year's resolutions. But research suggests only a third of us manage to stick with them.

The good news: you can boost your chances of success simply by swapping negative beliefs about your current fitness – or ability to improve it – with positive ones. Viewing yourself as a committed athlete from day one, rather than waiting until you're fitter/faster/stronger/leaner to take yourself seriously can help. Here's why.

Studies show that our thoughts impact our physiology. Basically, believing you're 'bad at exercise' makes your body less capable.

In one study*, people who were told they were genetically predisposed to struggle with cardio experienced noticeable negative physiological changes in their endurance capacity – so much so that researchers noted the participants' *beliefs* about their genetic fitness often mattered more than their genes.

Luckily, this effect works in reverse, too. In a separate study*, hotel cleaners who were informed that their jobs provided great exercise experienced improved health and reduced blood pressure within four weeks – without the need for behavioural changes.

Our mindsets have a tangible effect, says psychologist Alia Crum, who worked across both studies. 'They influence what you pay attention to. They influence our physiology and they influence what we actually do.'

The way you frame your resolutions is important, too. A Stockholm University study tracked the progress of 1,066 resolution hopefuls. Those with 'approach goals' (adopting new, healthy habits) were 25% more likely to succeed than those with 'avoidance goals' (quitting something, such as alcohol).

In other words, stop telling yourself you 'always fail' and start celebrating those small wins. You're smashing it.

VICTORY BEGINS IN THE MIND

WORDS: SCARLETT WRENCH; KIERAN ALGER. PHOTOGRAPHY: JONATHAN MINSTER; ROWAN FEE; AGATA PEC; ALAMY.
DIGITAL MANIPULATION: SCRATCHINPOST.CO.UK. *SOURCES: STANFORD UNIVERSITY; *PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE*

TEXT A PT

CAN I REALLY BURN FAT AND BUILD MUSCLE MASS AT THE SAME TIME?

Liam, Woolwich

Today 5:17pm

I'm back in the gym after a bit of a break. And let's just say I've got my work cut out here...

You'll be up to speed in no time! To burn fat, we need to increase your metabolic demand – really getting your heart rate up. And targeting full-body, compound strength moves will help you get strong

Got any suggestions? It's been a while...

Squats, pull-ups, deadlifts, presses – all of these movements require multiple muscle groups to work together and will help you pack on mass 💪

How long have you got right now?

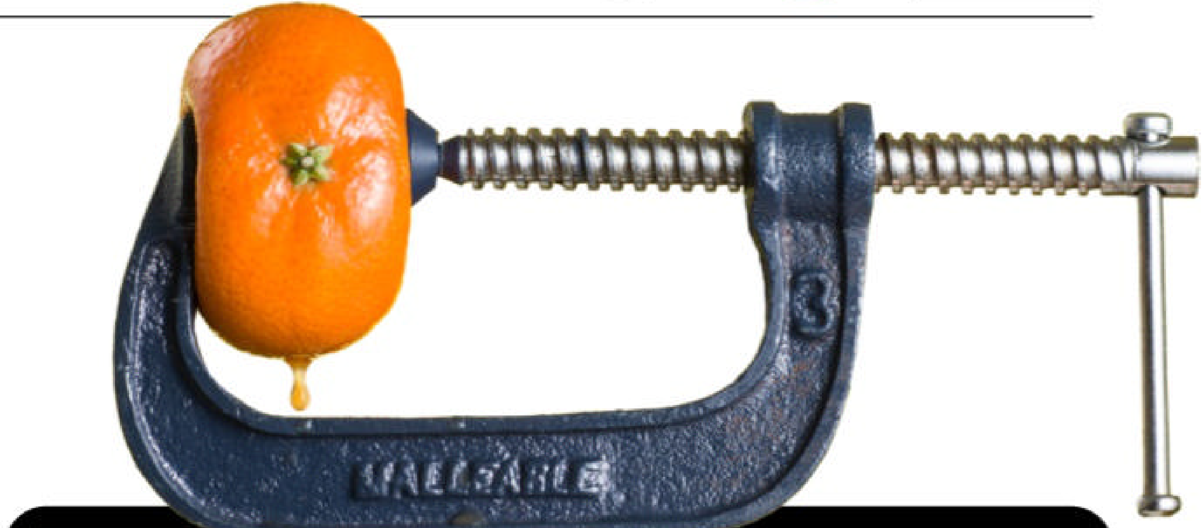
Probably half an hour, tops.

Then try this workout for maximum muscle engagement and a big metabolic demand 🔥 Set a running clock for roughly 20 to 25 minutes and blast through the following:

12x DB front rack squats, 10x DB floor presses, 8x DB alternating reverse lunges, 6x chest to floor burpees, 250m row

Try to maintain a challenging but consistent pace from start to finish. You've got this ✊

Pelé Zachariah, head of performance at Rowbots, London PZ



DOES IT WORK?

WHAT'S THE VERDICT ON JUICE FASTS THESE DAYS? GOOD FOR A RESET?

Rami, Bristol

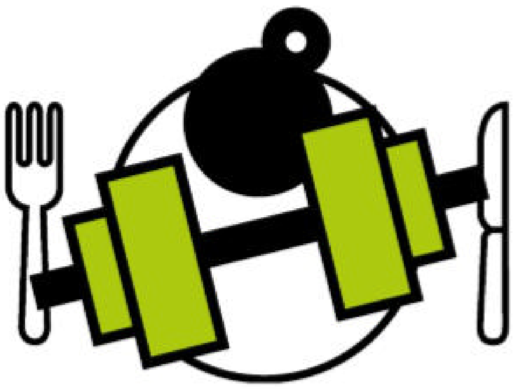
Subsisting on green juice is likely to result in short-term weight loss; you'd struggle to knock back the 2,500 daily calories the average man burns each day. Plus, a study in *Scientific Reports* found three days of drinking nothing but liquids (juiced greens, roots, citrus fruit and almond milk) led to beneficial changes in gut bacteria. However, there are downsides: by stripping the fibre out of fresh produce – particularly fruit – you concentrate the sugar. 'All that sugar means you're raising your insulin levels,' says dietitian Rick Miller. 'And most juices don't include any protein.' It's also likely to hinder energy and focus. Our verdict? Not worth it. If you're still set on the idea, fast for one or two days, ideally when you don't have much on, and supplement with a blended bean broth for added fibre. Oh, and there's no need to pay £35 a day for a delivery box. That's a squeeze you can do without.

PERSONAL SHOPPER

I'M DOING VEGANUARY THIS YEAR. WHAT'S THE BEST VEGAN PROTEIN?

Ant, Liverpool

Plant-based blends have come a long way since the days of grassy-tasting shakes with poor macro counts. These three rated top in our *MH* Lab tests:



BEST ALL ROUNDER

OTE Sports Soya Protein, £38.50 for 14 sachets **8.9/10**

Ideal for refuelling on the move, these sachets can be slipped into your sports bag or coat pocket. Each serving provides 25g of protein from soya – a complete protein – as well as useful electrolyte minerals.

BEST LOW CALORIE

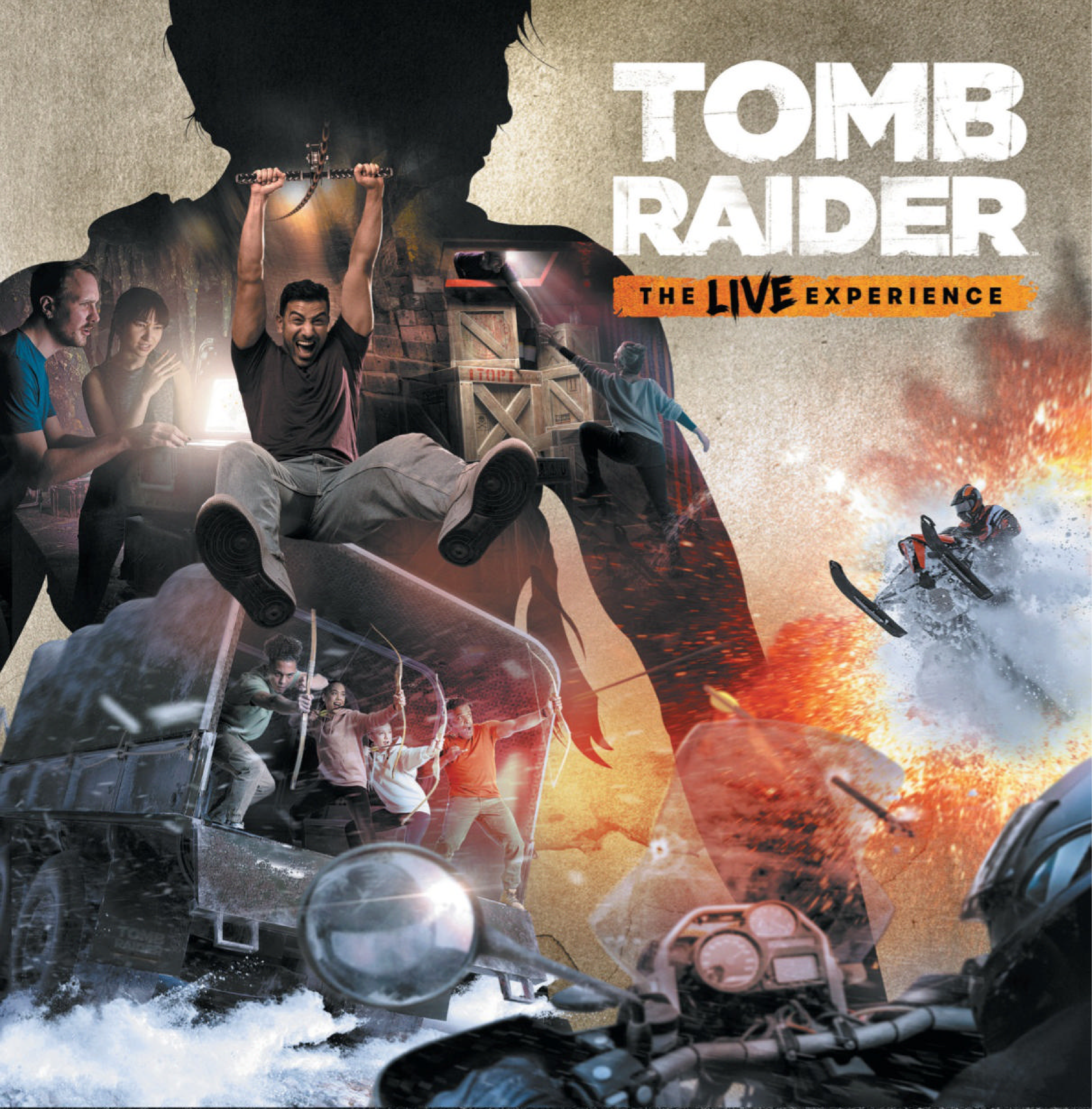
PhD Diet Plant Powder, £16 for 500g **7.9/10**

This budget-friendly pea and soya powder serves up some impressive numbers. Each 97-calorie serving provides 21g of protein – more than many whey blends. Plus, it's sugar-free.

BEST FOR VERSATILITY

Huel Complete Protein, £25 for 26 servings **7.8/10**

This blends pea, hemp and broad bean for a pleasant-tasting shake with 20g of protein, plus a bonus 26 vitamins and minerals. It also works mixed in with overnight oats or cooked in your porridge.



BECOME THE HERO

UNLEASH YOUR INNER LARA CROFT IN THIS STUNNING IMMERSIVE ADVENTURE

CAMDEN, LONDON | BOOK NOW | TOMBRAIDERLIVE.CO.UK

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WHY BEER IS YOUR NEW PROBIOTIC

A little of what you fancy does your gut some good. Particularly, it seems, if that's a cold glass of amber nectar

POUR OUT A COLD ONE TO GIVE YOUR MICROBIOME A BOOST

Dry January has noble goals and measurable benefits to your health. A paper published in the *British Medical Journal* found that a single alcohol-free month can lower your blood pressure, reduce your risk of diabetes and cut your cholesterol levels, while dialling down the presence of cancer-related proteins in your blood. According to the campaign's organiser, Alcohol Change UK, 70% of those who abstain report improved sleep and – crucially in Britain today – more than 85% save money.

So, what to do with the increasing body of research suggesting that, in the right dose, beer rivals wine as a super-booze? A source of antioxidants and containing more B vitamins than the trusty glass of red that long-lived Mediterraneans swear by, the ice-cold brew in your fridge is a somewhat complicated proposition. Is it a blessing or a vice?

The answer, of course, is that it is both, and moderation is key. In a recent study published in the *Journal Of Agricultural And Food Chemistry*, test subjects drank just over 300ml of lager – that's about as much as a small can – every day for four weeks, with no adverse effects on their heart health or weight. Meanwhile, their gut microbiome's bacterial diversity significantly improved. A crucial determinant of human health, 'friendly' gut bacteria have been linked to strong immunity and speedier weight loss, as well as the regulation of both muscle mass and function.

What all of this means is that a quick post-work beer is nothing to feel guilty about. But if you do want to go dry this month, simply switch over to the non-alcoholic variety, which the same study found was equally beneficial. It's your round, we believe.

MIGHTY BREW

Your low- or no-ABV beer has benefits beyond keeping your head fresh for tomorrow's morning meeting

01 / BOUNCE BACK FASTER
Researchers have found that drinking non-alcoholic wheat beer reduces inflammation in marathon runners, aiding their post-race recovery*.

02 / TAKE THE EDGE OFF
Anxiety levels fell among test subjects in one notable study*, possibly due to the relaxing effects of the hops and the amino acid lysine in 0% ABV beer.

03 / SWEET DREAMS
Spanish researchers found that the moderate consumption of non-alcoholic beer improved sleep quality, partly due to hop resin's sedative qualities*.

WORDS: YO ZUSHI. PHOTOGRAPHY: JOBE LAWRENSON. *SOURCES: TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT MÜNCHEN; *NEUROCHEMICAL JOURNAL*; *PLOS ONE*

TRIED AND TESTED ✓

MEAL PREP MADE EASY

Food delivery services take the hassle out of healthy eating. Can they help you chew through your new year goals?

At one time the preserve of pro athletes with cash to splash – but no time to cook – meal delivery boxes are now more affordable and ubiquitous than ever. These days, your options extend far beyond the rudimentary 'meat or veggie', too. Many of the latest brands aim to cater to your every dietary requirement and nutritional whim, from the plant-based to the ketogenic, gluten-free to pescatarian, calorie-controlled to muscle-fuelling.

Some services do all the hard work for you; simply shovel the grub straight from the biodegradable cardboard tray into your mouth. Others target the aspirant chef, offering pre-portioned ingredients and idiot-proof guidelines so you can prepare healthy meals at home.

But with multiple options to pick from, it's hard to know which is best suited to your goals and lifestyle. The *MH* team trialled three days' worth of fuel from five leading brands to discern which are worth your cash.

01
THE ATHLETE'S CHOICE

7.5/10

Fresh Fitness Food, about £9 per meal

Good For: PB-chasers who want their macros delivered with pinpoint accuracy and zero prep.

Assembly Required? ✗

THE PROMISE Meal plans are customisable with the option to track macros via the intuitive FFF app. Our tester trialled a 10% calorie deficit with pescetarian recipes. Meals arrive overnight and can be eaten out of the box.

THE VERDICT *MH* found the meals surprisingly satiating, given the modest calorie count. (The fish tikka with bombay potatoes was a highlight.) We'd probably skip the breakfast box – often granola and yoghurt or eggs – and stick to two meals per day. Our only gripe was one AWOL morning delivery, plus the price point is a little punchy.

02
POWER PLANTS

8/10

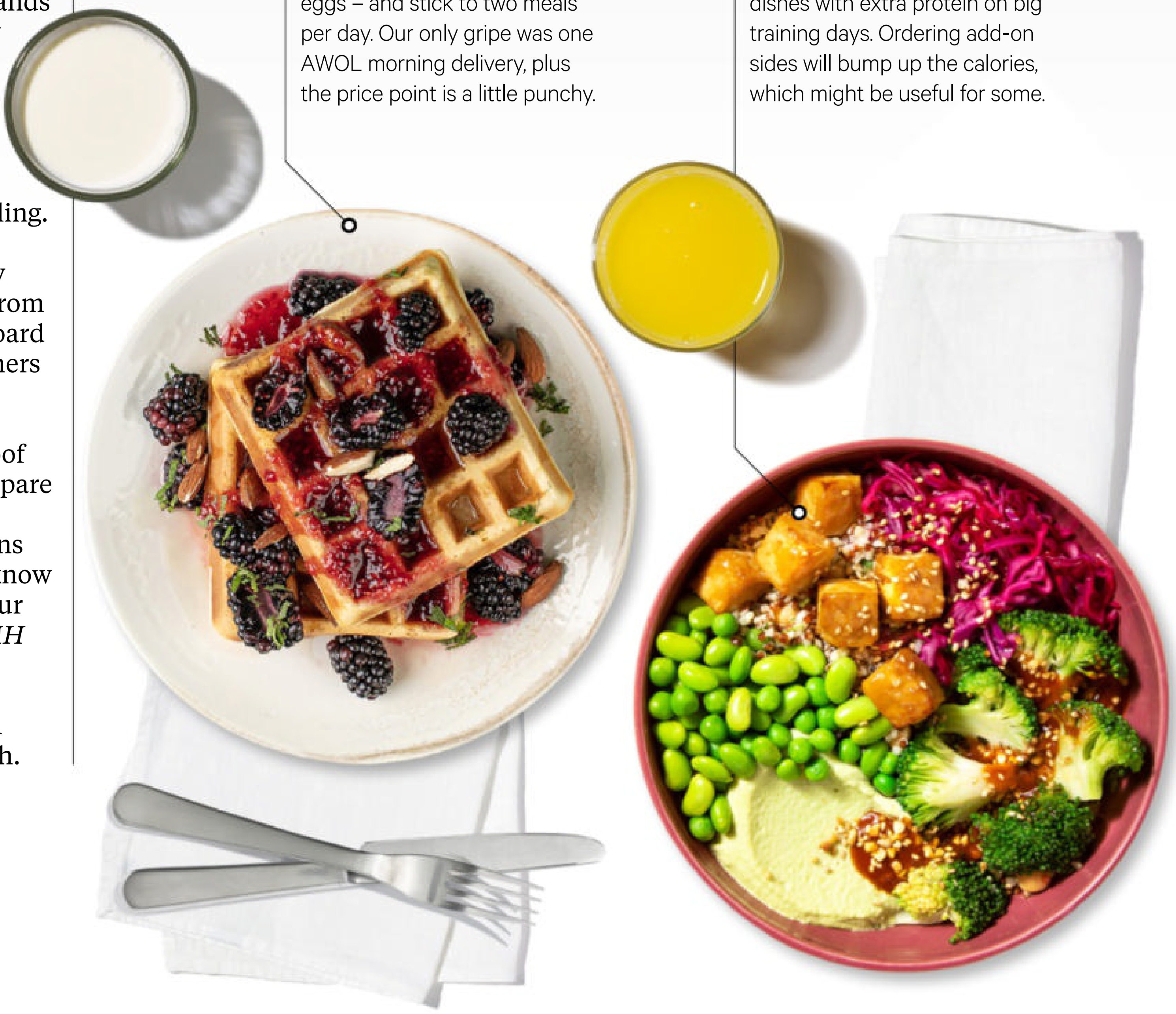
Allplants, about £5.75 per meal

Good For: Vegans and flexitarians looking to fill their freezers with nutritious meat-free meals.

Assembly Required? ✗

THE PROMISE Pick from a menu of more than 100 chef-prepared meals, then choose your delivery slot. Every meal dishes out at least two of your five-a-day and the packaging is collected and reused, too.

THE VERDICT Our tester, a vegan CrossFitter, praised the presentation, including extra toppings, and the prioritisation of whole foods over processed faux meats. The truffle mushroom orzo was a favourite, although she did top up some carb-heavy dishes with extra protein on big training days. Ordering add-on sides will bump up the calories, which might be useful for some.



WORDS: SCARLETT WRENCH. PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL HEDGE; STUDIO 33

03
THE KETO KING

6.5/10

Green Chef, about £5.94 per meal

Good For: Low-carb diners who crave something more inspiring than plain, grilled meat – but are lacking culinary nous.

Assembly Required? ✓

THE PROMISE Our tester trialled Green Chef's keto kits, a rotating weekly selection of meat and fish dishes; other menus, such as vegan and lower-carb, are available, too. Pre-portioned ingredients are shipped to your house so meals can be cooked in roughly 30 minutes, with kits designed to serve two or four.

THE VERDICT Our tester found the meals to be generously sized and satisfying; the creamy mushroom and cod was a hit, although other options such as bacon-topped chicken felt a bit entry-level. Portioned ingredients do mean extra plastic waste, too.

THE TEST KITCHEN

What makes a good box? Here are our judges' criteria

01 TASTE AND SATIETY Whether you're cutting calories or just minding your macros, satisfaction is still crucial to consider. Variety counts for a lot, too.

02 EASE OF USE We don't ask for much – recipes should be simple to follow, apps intuitive and placing orders straightforward.

03 VALUE FOR MONEY Now, more than ever, your cash needs to go further. Deliveries aren't cheap – but are they worth it?

04
CALORIE-COUNTED

6/10

HelloFresh, about £4.75 per meal

Good For: Reluctant chefs who want easy, portion-controlled meals minus the microwave.

Assembly Required? ✓

THE PROMISE At the more affordable end of the scale (meals start at £3.15 a head), HelloFresh has a broad selection of recipes that change weekly. Ingredients are portioned down to the gram. *MH* tried the Calorie Smart and High Protein boxes.

THE VERDICT Instructions are easy to follow, even for novice cooks, and the wide variety of recipes makes boredom unlikely. Portion sizes were satisfying, even for lower-cal meals. Excess packaging is a sticking point, though, and our tester found that some of the ingredients were of poorer quality than he'd like.

05
GREEN MACHINE

8.5/10

Mindful Chef, about £5.50 per meal

Good For: Those who care as much about provenance and sustainability as they do their macros and micros.

Assembly Required? ✓

THE PROMISE All of Mindful Chef's meals are free from gluten, dairy and refined carbs, while fish is sustainably caught and its beef grass-fed. Our tester trialled the vegan range, which included spicy sesame tofu as well as squash with lentil tikka masala. There are also one-man options for those who live alone.

THE VERDICT By favouring paper over plastic and employing carbon-offsetting strategies, Mindful Chef helped our tester feel a little less guilty about his deliveries. Meals were filling, while cutting refined carbs helps swerve the post-lunch slump.

YOUR PERSONAL TRAINER ON THE MOVE

GREAT REASONS TO GET THE DIGITAL EDITION

9:41 AM Wed Mar 18
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24
BLACK ADAM
Eddie Jones' Last Stand
ALASTAIR CAMPBELL GRILLS A DEFIANT ENGLAND MANAGER
JAN/FEB 2023
9:41
Reasons Why Men Don't Talk (And How To Start)

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ANTI HERO

NO MUSCLE PADS
REQUIRED IN THE
BLACK ADAM SUIT

Dwayne's World

The Rock, aka Mr Dwayne Douglas Johnson, is entering his fifties – or what he calls his *'fifth level'* – in the best shape of his life. In this rare interview, he explains how he has made that possible, and why, above all else, it's essential you stay true to yourself, even if it means being the bad guy every once in a while

Words by Ben Jhoty & Ben Court →

JOHNSON IS HERE TO DISRUPT THE SUPERHERO GENRE

Dwayne Johnson

is standing in his home office in Los Angeles, a bright and inviting space into which sunlight pours through French windows. Next to him is a life-size replica of a T-Rex skull – an unapologetically masculine objet d'art – while on a shelf behind stand numerous bottles of his own tequila brand, Teremana. Johnson wears a black Project Rock muscle tee, tattoos creeping out of the sleeves over his prodigious biceps, and red shorts. Needless to say, he is in incredible shape.

The Rock, as he is perhaps more famously known, is fresh off the buzz surrounding *Black Adam*, a passion project he'd been thinking about for 15 years. It's a notable addition to his canon for a number of reasons. First, as many have supposed in relation to Tom Cruise, you wonder if Johnson is too big a star in his own right for comic-book fare. Are the power of his personality and the wattage of his charisma somehow neutered in spandex? Time will tell on that one. Second, the film required the most likable and popular actor of his generation to play an antihero. Finally, it also required him to get into the best shape of his life. 'That was our goal, for me to bring in the best physique possible,' says Johnson. 'So the challenge with that is not only do you set the bar high – which is fine, bring it on! – but then in realising that you have to maintain it for months.'

Johnson prides himself on being the hardest worker in the room. It's this ethic that's kept him at the head of the Hollywood pack for more than two decades now. And as he enters his fifties, he's certainly not letting up. The day job includes finishing production on *Red One*, an adventure comedy with Chris Evans, as well as shooting several undisclosed movies and season three of NBC's *Young Rock*. Then there's work with his brands: Under Armour's Project Rock, the aforementioned Teremana Tequila and Zoa energy drinks. He's also a co-owner of the XFL, a new American football league, set to kick off in February 2023. All told, Johnson's net worth is a swole $1bn-plus.

Meanwhile, at home, he's busy raising his two younger daughters, Jasmine (six) and Tiana (four), with his wife, Lauren Hashian. (His 21-year-old daughter, Simone, who he raised with ex-wife and current business partner Dany Garcia, recently signed a deal with the WWE.) If anything, Johnson says, this is the time when, as a man, you've got to double down on the work. But then, you might say, he has always lived between the Rock and a hard place. Discomfort. It's where you have to go to get results.

Men's Health: **How's your day going?**
Dwayne Johnson: Just got up with the babies. Regardless of what time you go

PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY: FLANNERY UNDERWOOD

to bed, they're up. I went to bed probably around 1.30am, as I normally do. Babies had me up at 6am. I'll go train [next].

***MH:* Let's start with *Black Adam*. What excited you about the role?**

DJ: It's been 15 years since we first started talking about it, and seven years since we all agreed – Seven Bucks Productions, Warner Bros, DC – that we were going to make it. What excited me about it was delivering a character in the superhero genre that had never been seen before. No actors had played Black Adam. In addition, but more important, is the opportunity to disrupt the superhero genre. You have a character like Black Adam, who is – depending on how you interpret his philosophies – is he a superhero, or an antihero, or just a bad dude? Now, the difference is in *Superman*, there's a code of ethics that Superman abides by, which is why he is the greatest superhero. Superman won't kill anyone. Black Adam, on the other hand, you can't finish your sentence if you mean harm to him or his family.

***MH:* Did you have any internal conflict about playing against public perception?**

DJ: I've identified so deeply with Black Adam. Yes, he lives in a grey area, but his philosophy is black and white. If you hurt the ones I love or my country, you're going to pay. And there are no questions asked. There's no bringing you to justice. There's no apprehending you. You die. What also was very appealing to me, and I think will appeal to a lot of people, is that you can't put him in a box and you can't say, 'You have to be like this. You can't do this. You have to do that.' I felt like I experienced that throughout my career when I first got to Hollywood 20 years ago: 'You can't call yourself The Rock. You can't talk about pro wrestling. You can't be this big. You can't work out as much. Change your diet. Lose weight. If you want to be like Will Smith, Johnny Depp, George Clooney – who were the stars at that time – this is how you have to be.' Well, I tried that on for a few years, and then finally I said, 'Man, fuck this. I can't be like that. I'm not those guys. I could never be those guys. I'm not in a box. Don't tell me how to be. I'm going to be myself.'

'I'm not in a box. Don't tell me how to be. I'm going to be myself'

***MH:* Did you have to train even harder to fill out the Black Adam costume?**

DJ: We did. My goal was to bring in the best physique of my career, and that includes my years as a football player and as a pro wrestler. I've worked with Dave Rienzi, my trainer, very closely now for over a decade. The real challenge was to maintain that [physique] for months. It's not a case of, 'All right. Go after it and grit and grind it out.' No. You can't do that because your body can't sustain it and your body will break down, no matter whether you're in your twenties or your sixties. So we had to really approach it with care and science. [Dave] was there throughout the shoot and constantly looking at my body, seeing how it's coming along. How's my sodium intake? How are the carbs? There's just so much we have to look at.

Now, what's interesting is we could have said, 'Fuck this, put the muscle pads in the suit.' As they normally do. And it's not a knock to my friends at all. But I felt like, 'Let's be disruptive and let's do it differently.' Let's take all the muscle pads out, which we did for Black Adam. So when you have that suit on, every detail shows. Man, it was constant work, constant tweaking, tweaking, tweaking for months.

***MH:* You turned 50 last May. How are you feeling about that?**

DJ: There are markers you have in your life. As dudes, you hit your thirties, you like to think you've got your shit together. But you generally have no fucking clue. You're trying to work your shit out. And you're trying to fake it till you make it, that kind of thing. You hit your forties, hopefully you're starting your family, you're getting settled, feeling comfortable and then you're going through a lot [of other stuff] in your forties, too. I wanted to hit the fifth level in my rhythm and groove. What I mean by that is that my body was in a great place, that it wasn't too banged up.

So really, in my thirties and early forties, when I was coming off of wrestling, I was still feeling the effects of all my injuries. At 40, I said, 'Okay, I'm going to spend the next decade training as smart as I can, balancing out training and family and work, being an open sponge, learning every day but also not worrying about ego training, not worrying about the weight that I'm putting on the bar, pushing myself so hopefully, by the time I hit the fifth level, my joints are feeling great and I'm still able to not only maintain, but add real muscle and some really dense muscle.' That's a long answer to tell you I'm feeling pretty good.

***MH:* Has your diet changed?**

DJ: My philosophy is to eat clean and make sure that my diet is commensurate with my goals, which stay consistent throughout the year. It's better to stay in shape than to get in shape. I am a real creature of habit. I usually eat the same thing every day for days and weeks and months. It's very consistent. It's very boring. It's also extremely disciplined. That's something I picked up from my old man, who was a hardcore gym fanatic. He taught me very early on not to eat to please the tongue but to eat to nourish the body. He taught me that when I was five. That's probably why I need therapy.

***MH:* What's your breakfast, lunch and dinner?**

DJ: Well, I eat six meals a day [and they're all similar in terms of nutrients]. Breakfast consists of eggs, a meat like bison, a complex carb like oatmeal and fruit, usually either papaya or blueberries. My second meal, around 10am, usually consists of a chicken breast, a complex carb like rice and some greens. And dinner is fish or chicken, a complex carb like sweet potatoes and some greens.

***MH:* You count your macros, right?**

DJ: In a very specific way, yes. I have a strength and conditioning coach. I have a nutritionist. I also have a lead chef adviser who speaks to a lot of the chefs I work with because I'm often in different locations. So they work out all that math and they extrapolate. They're much better and smarter at that than I am. I do see results quickly when we adjust the macros. [The range is: protein 40% to 45%, carbs 40% to 50%, fats 15% to 20%.] We've got it down to a science where we fine-tune the macros and I never feel hungry. That's the key: training and dieting down for a goal requires discipline, and you can often feel hungry.

MH: How has your training evolved?

DJ: I still train with the same intensity, but I'd like to think I train smarter. When I was 25, I was doing Olympic lifts, which are tough on the joints with the torque. I actually train for a shorter period of time, but I get more out of it. What I've also been able to do with experience is listen to my body. You know, there's a difference between the pain that you can work through – and that's good to work through – and the pain where you have to stop what you're doing and take care of that particular part of your body that's hurt.

MH: With great power comes great responsibility. You have 340 million followers on Instagram craving your fitness content. Is that exhausting?

DJ: It's a blessing. I've trained long enough to know that there are some good takeaways that I could share that could help my audience in their fitness and wellness journey. One of the responsibilities, though, is to make sure that the things I'm posting are smart, training-wise, not dumb shit that'll get you hurt. Guys do that all the time. They train out of ego and they train to get views and you see them doing crazy exercises. Some are very entertaining, but some are pretty dangerous, too. I think it's really important to make sure that you don't lose the integrity of why you're in the gym to begin with. You're in the gym to build your muscles or whatever your goal is. Usually, when I do post training stuff, it's towards the end of my workout or my final set. I don't do anything in between. I get in the gym and I don't fuck around.

MH: Training isn't just about physical strength. How does it affect you mentally?

DJ: Psychological nourishment. I really feel that there are fundamental skills that you learn at the gym in terms of discipline, working through your fatigue, pushing past what you perceive as a limit. Because there's greatness on the other side. There are little achievements along the way that you're gonna gain from your training. Big achievements, too.

MH: You've experienced depression. Does training help manage that?

DJ: I think so, sure. During those times when I fell into and was challenged by depression, the gym became my best friend – and I know it's like that for a lot of people. You're able to go to the gym to sweat out toxins and get a little bit more clarity when you walk out the door. It doesn't fix the problem, but it helps.

MH: Over the past few years, you've opened up more about your spirituality. How does that help you?

DJ: So I'm half black and half Samoan. And on the Samoan side, there's a Polynesian word called mana. Really what it means is like an energy, a force, a power that we all have, and it's ever existent in our world. When I talk about mana, it's a feeling that I get that's just here deep in the DNA, and you can get it when you walk into the gym. You can feel the mana. It can be quite palpable.

Rapid Fire

Frenemy exercise?
'Barbell rows.'

Cheat meal?
'A combo of a great cheeseburger, fries and a great dessert… I like combining a lot of shit with cookies. I'll do peanut butter and a chocolate-chip cookie. Put some caramel chips in there. I do stuff like that.'

Happy place?
'Quiet: on my farm or fishing or in the gym.'

Favourite movies starring you?
'*Jumanji, Jungle Cruise, Black Adam*.'

Favourite movies not starring you?
'*The Godfather I* and *II*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*.'

Karaoke song?
'*The Blues Man*, Hank Williams Jr.'

MH: Is that something that you try to tap into daily or you just feel it?

DJ: For me, mana becomes my daily anchor, and it's a reminder of my cultures. It's a reminder of who I am and it's a reminder to work hard, to be humble, to show gratitude. And it's also a reminder to always connect with people, like we could be connected through mana. It's very powerful.

MH: Do you feel like you're connecting with your spiritual side more now?

DJ: Well, I have always been connected to my cultures, my family and my ancestors. But as you go down the road of life, you start to get more connected with your spirituality in that kind of way where you start to realise what mana actually means, you know?

MH: Does anything scare you?

DJ: The thing that keeps me up at night is just how everything shakes out, the things we have planned, the things I can control. Making the right moves, thinking about my family, my babies, all the other stuff that's going on. Once I get everyone to bed, there's a window of about two hours when the whole house is quiet where I do most of my thinking and where I can accomplish most of my thoughts from beginning to end. Then I can go to sleep with usually some clarity. Tequila helps, too.

MH: You have a lot going on. How do you prioritise and find balance?

JOHNSON STILL TRAINS HARD, BUT SMARTER THAN HE USED TO
35
IRON GRIP

PHOTOGRAPHY: FLANNERY UNDERWOOD. BLACK ADAM SLEEVELESS HOODIE AND SHORTS (WORN THROUGHOUT) BY UNDER ARMOUR'S PROJECT ROCK

DJ: I prioritise things by asking, 'Do I love them? Am I passionate about them?' They could be big things, they could be little things, but either way, whatever they are, if they don't get me out of bed and if I'm not running towards those things, then I don't do them. That's how I prioritise things. How I find balance is by making sure that I still remain in touch with the simple core things that are important to me. Life can get crazy and funny for all of us, but especially when you get a little bit of fame, things have a tendency to go sideways. So I like doing simple core things that keep the stability.

***MH:* Communication is really important, too, right?**

DJ: Oh, man, I think one of the defining, seminal moments in my life was when I really realised the power and the value of asking for help. Vulnerability. You know, really kind of checking your ego at the door. As guys, we have a tendency to not ask for help. Ego gets in the way, and we start stuffing things deep down in our guts, which is not a good thing. I've become an advocate for asking for help. And it wasn't always like that, and it's much easier said than done. I grew up an only child. I was that guy who would stuff things down and not talk about them, and I'd figure it out all by myself. Most of the time I did figure it out all by myself, but also it just took a toll, man, on my soul and on my mental health. So these days, I'm a big advocate for asking for help. Also, I've lost friends, uh, who checked out and, yeah, ended their lives because they didn't want to ask for help. Yeah. So you gotta communicate. You gotta ask for help. There's no shame in that. If you don't know something, ask. If you don't know, ask.

How Dwayne Johnson Stays Forever Fit

When Johnson hit his mid-forties, he started changing his gym tactics. 'The wear and tear in the joints, it catches up with you,' says his longtime trainer, Dave Rienzi. To keep Johnson in antihero shape, Rienzi implements these four strategies in his routine.

01 / Pre-Exhaust Your Muscles

Johnson doesn't want to train ultra-heavy, so he makes lighter loads challenging. He'll often do a set of an isolation move (say, a chest cable fly), then immediately follow up with a compound move (say, a bench press). The iso move leaves his chest fatigued, making the compound move harder, even with a moderate weight.

02 / Do Glutes For Days

'We really prioritise training the posterior chain,' says Rienzi. Johnson does Romanian deadlifts two or three times weekly in order to attack his back muscles, glutes and hamstrings. Glute muscles help protect the lower back – and keep him explosive.

03 / Squat Late

Most lifters do squats early in their workout. Johnson often does them as the last move of leg day. That means his leg muscles are already burned out from other lifts (such as those Romanian deadlifts), so he can tax his quads and hamstrings with a moderate weight.

04 / Slow. It. Down.

During at least two moves in every workout, Johnson concentrates on time under tension. He'll grab a moderate weight for, say, a biceps curl, then curl up, squeeze his biceps, and slowly lower the weight for four seconds. 'Thirty-five-pound (16kg) dumbbell curls with a four-sec negative for 10 reps is a brutal exercise,' Rienzi says. Do three to four sets. Enjoy the burn.

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Men'sHealth

Head Strong

Good health starts up top

24 Reasons Why Men Don't Talk About Their Mental Health...

YOU DON'T HAVE
TO STAND ALONE

...And Why They're All B*ll*cks

Speaking your mind is easier in theory than in practice. **Especially when our brains are so good at coming up with excuses.** Consider your own busted

WORDS BY JOSHUA DAVID STEIN AND SCARLETT WRENCH

01

There's Nothing Wrong With Me

▪ This article isn't about you, right? You're fine. But here's the crucial thing: acknowledging that it's useful to work on your mental health doesn't mean there's something wrong with your brain any more than going to the gym to train your triceps means there's something wrong with your arms. It's just good practice.

02

Fine. But I Don't Have A Mental Health Problem

▪ 'Think of mental health as a continuum. No one is completely mentally healthy, or completely mentally ill,' says Amy Morin, a psychotherapist and the author of *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do*. She advises thinking about it in the same way you do your physical wellbeing. Waiting until a problem is threatening to derail your daily routine is a far less efficient strategy than seeking advice – whether from a professional, a trusted friend or even a book – when symptoms arise. Or, to put it another way, 'Most men aren't embarrassed to go to see a dentist to keep their teeth healthy.'

03

My Problems Aren't That Bad. I Can Deal With Them Myself

▪ Perhaps you can. But if you've been trying for some time and it's still not working, do what you'd do in any other situation: 'Get an outside opinion. Objective advice is key to seeing your problems in a different way,' says Morin. Talk to someone you trust, or go to the experts. 'Therapists have specialised knowledge and can therefore reduce the time that's needed for improvement.'

04

Having A Mental Health Problem Means That I'm Weak

▪ 'There's a difference between acting tough and being strong,' says Morin. 'It's easy to act tough by pretending your problems don't exist.' But addressing the issues takes true strength. If you're struggling with self-perception, it might help to make a list of men you admire who have spoken out about mental health difficulties. That might be anyone from an actor such as The Rock, to boxer Tyson Fury, musician Stormzy or even the hosts of *SAS: Who Dares Wins*. Would you describe them as 'weak'?

PUTTING PEN TO PAPER CAN BE A GOOD START

A LOT TO UNTANGLE? BE A BRIGHT SPARK AND SEEK HELP

05

My Problems Are Just Too Complicated To Fix

▪ That's not the point. Your brain isn't a faulty plug socket. A good first step is to forget about fixing yourself and focus on working out exactly what it is you're feeling, and what might be the root cause.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUN LEE. DIGITAL MANIPULATION: SCRATCHINPOST.CO.UK. PROP STYLIST: MANDY MAKER. ILLUSTRATIONS: BEN MOUNSEY-WOOD

06

What If Word Gets Round Among My Friends?

So what if it does? If they really are your friends, they won't judge you for having difficulties with your mental health, or for taking steps to manage it. They will support you, just as you'd support them if they were in the same situation. Friends have got your back – it's in the job description. If they haven't… well then we'd probably advise finding yourself some new friends.

07

I Just Don't Want People To Judge Me

You can't control other people's reactions, but you can try to confide in someone you know to be sympathetic to mental health issues. 'Even if you pick the wrong person, it's still the right step,' says Drew Ramsey, a psychiatrist and *Men's Health* adviser. 'People who are very private often seek [professional] help first to get a plan and support, then speak to their family and friends afterwards.'

08

I Don't Want A Therapist To Judge Me Either

A therapist is, by definition, disinterested in you. That doesn't mean 'not interested', though. You are a patient, one of approximately 15 that the average therapist sees in a week. They're not caught up in the details of your life. They're professionals, so they look at you in the same way your mechanic looks at your car's gearbox. This is helpful to keep in mind, even if you're already in therapy. One survey revealed that 93% of people lie to their therapists; the prime motivations are shame and fear of judgement.

09

I Wouldn't Even Know What To Say…

If you're ready to open up, consider 'coaching' the person you're talking to, says David Wexler, executive director of the Relationship Training Institute. 'Say something like, "I want to tell you something that's been bothering me, but all I need is for you to listen. I'm not looking for you to fix it, or come up with an action plan." A decent friend or family member – or therapist – can rise to that.'

10

I Just Don't Want To Be A Burden

Here's another way to think about it: in a *Men's Health* survey of more than 15,000 readers, 34% of respondents said that they would be more comfortable addressing a topic such as depression if a friend talked about his own mental wellbeing first. Perhaps, then, you should try to see this as a matter of helping to unburden others.

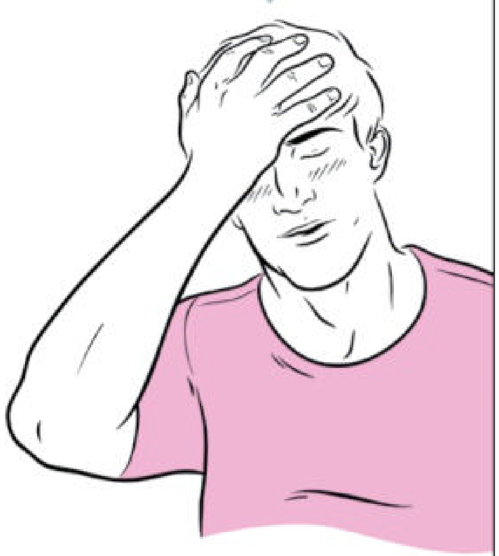
'Depression and anxiety are extremely common,' says integrative psychiatrist Gregory Scott Brown. 'Often, when men open up to a friend, it's either an experience that person can relate to personally, or they know someone who was able to overcome a similar struggle.'

11

I Talk To My Partner. Isn't That Enough?

That's a good thing – but it has its limits. 'Sometimes, men think talking to their partners is a substitute for therapy,' says Morin. 'But while it's important to be able to talk about how you're feeling, venting every day may strain a relationship. It's a problem I've seen in my work. The partner who is listening may feel pressure to cheer the other person up, or calm them down.' Carry on talking to your other half. But if things don't seem to be improving, you might need to speak to a professional, too.

→



12

Dragging Up Old Stuff Sounds Miserable

▪ It can be, yes. But in that sense, psychotherapy isn't too different from, say, physiotherapy. Both kinds of therapy can be painful in the short-term, but both will ultimately help you get better. If you need to have a hard conversation, just grit your teeth and go through with it. It's worth it.

13

Once You Start Addressing This Stuff, You'll Never Be Done With It

▪ Few of us struggle to accept that maintaining good physical health is a lifelong commitment. Likewise with your mental wellbeing. But built into your long-term plan can be shorter, sharper programmes to zero in on specific issues. For certain issues, such as phobias and compulsive habits, an intensive three-hour course can be enough to free you. You are not condemning yourself to a lifetime on the psychologist's couch just because you speak the words, 'I'm scared', or concede that your childhood probably wasn't all that.

14

I Went To See A Therapist Once, But He Just Sat There And Didn't Say Anything

▪ We asked Dr Wexler for his thoughts...

Q: Why is it that you just sit there and make vaguely sympathetic noises but don't speak?

A: [Silence.]

Q: No, but seriously.

A: [Silence.]

Q: Oh, I get it. It's because in some types of therapy, your job isn't so much to direct me as it is to give me space to express myself. It's as if all these words I'm saying are clearing out the tubes of my mind, like an emotional bilge pump, until, exhausted, we start getting down to issues I've long kept hidden, either because they seem so trifling – such as when I fell off my bike at the age of eight and started crying, and instead of empathising with me, my dad sarcastically said, 'Wah-wah!' – or because they're shameful, like the fact that I think that I'm fundamentally unlovable and that if I let anyone know me – I mean really know me – with my defences down, they'd see that. Is that it?

A: [Silence. Hands over a box of tissues.]

YOU WON'T FIND ANSWERS IN THERE

15-16

I Always Feel Better After A Pint And/Or A Workout

▪ Both may temporarily alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety, concedes Dr Brown, 'but neither helps to address the root causes'. While dealing with a mental health issue doesn't oblige you to give up drinking, using your pint of Budvar as an emotional prop isn't a failsafe coping mechanism.

And as for that training you're doing? That's a good, sustainable strategy, says Dr Brown. 'Studies have shown that people who are more physically active have a lower risk for developing depression. However, you're probably not going to cure any depression or severe anxiety by simply going for a run.'

17

I Want To Get Help, But I Have No Idea What To Ask For

Many so-called 'talking therapies' are available from the NHS. As for what all those abbreviations mean…

CBT
Cognitive behavioural therapy has a proven record for treating depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive compulsive disorder. You'll unpick your behavioural patterns, set goals and learn healthy new habits. You won't be asked to delve into your relationship with your mother.

MBCT
Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy teaches you to identify and manage challenging thoughts and feelings. It can be useful for those with addiction issues.

EMDR
Helpful after trauma, eye-movement desensitisation and reprocessing will help your brain to safely reprocess memories.

There's also counselling for everything from bereavement to panic attacks. Your counsellor won't tell you what to do, but will help you to understand your thought processes and come up with solutions.

18

Everyone Thinks I Have My Sh*t Together. I Can't Let Them See The Cracks

'Many men feel they need to have it all together all the time, despite how miserable they feel,' says Dr Samantha Dutton, a social worker and retired lieutenant colonel. But it's very hard to do a good job when you're miserable. So, if you need your shit together, you really can't afford to ignore your mental health.

EMPLOYEE
OF THE MONTH

SPEAK UP BEFORE BREAKING POINT

19

I'd Like Help, But NHS Waiting Times Are Too Long

There's no denying our health service is stretched, but it's still worth consulting your GP. If that doesn't appeal, consider self-help books: whatever you're grappling with, there will be a guide to managing it. You can also find local support groups at mind.org.uk (search 'local minds') or, if addiction is a concern, there are various free recovery groups such as AA. If you can free up a bit of budget, many organisations and some private therapists also offer reduced-cost therapy to those on low incomes (just ask), while BetterHelp offers access to licensed therapists via video or phone call, with subscriptions from about £30 per week

20

I Just Find All Of This Talk About Mental Health A Bit 'Millennial'

Worried about snowflake jibes? It's unfortunate but true that there's still a stigma, but the reality is not that young people are less resilient, rather that they're more open. According to YouGov research, nearly half of adults aged 55 and over say that they have experienced depression and/or anxiety. Besides, no one's asking you to post about it on Instagram or start a self-care journal. Do things your way – just don't do nothing.

WHEN RESPONSIBILITIES PILE UP, DON'T NEGLECT YOUR OWN WELLBEING

21

I Used To Be In Therapy, But It Didn't Help At All

■ If you've seen one therapist, you've just seen one therapist. Methods and mannerisms vary hugely. Finding someone who is right for you is less like picking a go-to morning coffee vendor than discovering your favourite pub. In the former case, proximity and waiting time are of chief importance. The latter is more about 'feeling' than anything else. 'I always encourage people to have consultations with two or three different therapists,' says Dr Ramsey. And don't worry about moving on if it's not a good fit. 'We're professionals. We can handle it.'

22

My Work Schedule Won't Allow It

■ Are you sure? Ask your HR department. Mental ill-health is covered by UK employment law, as well as companies' sick leave policies, so alterations to your hours and responsibilities can be discussed in the same way as if you were recovering from a bout of pneumonia. A formal diagnosis of, say, depression means that, by law, your employer is required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to your job spec. That might simply mean letting you leave early one day a week in order to see a therapist.

23

I Have So Many Other Things To Deal With, My Mental Health Isn't A Priority

■ Maybe not now, but if you don't look after it, sooner or later, you'll have to deal with it. Schedule in time today and you could save a lot of time in the long run.

24

Fine, I Admit It – I'm Scared

By author and journalist Joshua David Stein

■ I get it. A few years ago, my life started falling apart at an alarming clip. I was married (spoiler alert: *was*) and had two young children. I was at a point in my career where I felt things should be getting easier. But they weren't. As my cohort aged and had kids, I had fewer close friends. My marriage was in trouble. I struggled with intense, body-clenching rage and existential squid-ink darkness.

In the midst of what I guess was a mental breakdown, I tried to kill myself. At that point, seeking help became life or death. The evidence that I was really struggling with mental illness was incontrovertible; that it was affecting the people I love was equally uncontestable. I ended up in therapy, talking to a nice lady named Julia.

What a cliché, I thought, looking at her ready-to-pluck tissues and well-hugged pillow. But it felt good to talk to someone who wasn't mad at me for years of craziness, who could see me with professional compunction.

Julia suggested I might have something called borderline personality disorder (BPD), with symptoms including suicidal ideations, rage, impulsive behaviour and black-and-white thinking. The more I understood BPD, the more I understood what triggered what, and why. I'm not saying that I'm not responsible for the suffering I caused. I am. But I didn't have to beat myself up as much as I had.

Addressing my mental health wasn't enough to save my marriage. But it allowed me to know myself. Now, I'm happy – and sad – in a way I couldn't be before. And I'm more comfortable admitting, 'I'm scared.'

How I Keep It Together

Jim Weber

The CEO of Brooks Running lived his brand until cancer derailed his fitness. Five years on, he's found a new exercise groove – and is seeing his work thrive, too

INTERVIEW BY MARTY MUNSON

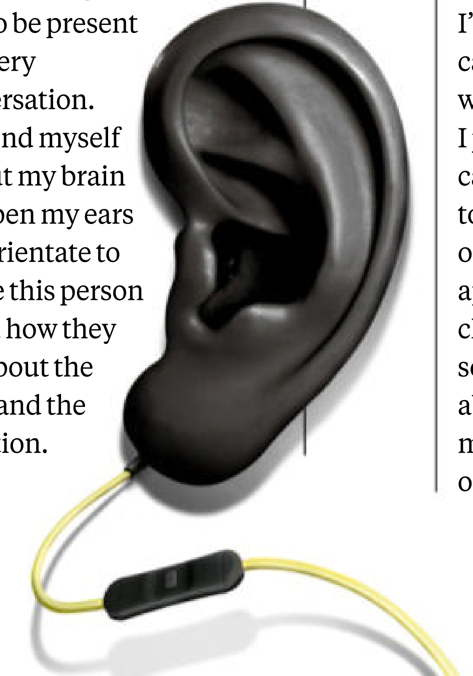
FOR WEBER, WORKING OUT IS NON-NEGOTIABLE

5.30am
Wake Up And Make The Coffee

I'm a morning person and I cherish these quiet hours to prepare for the day – catching up on emails and absorbing global, national, local and running-industry news. My wife and I love to have our first coffee by the window, with views of the Douglas firs that surround Lake Washington in Seattle.

8.30am
Know When To Listen

I live by my calendar, and the one-on-ones and small-group meetings on it really fill my cup. I used to be very focused on what I believed a CEO did: create plans, communicate and lead the execution. It took me a decade to figure out that it's about leading people. Now I try to be present for every conversation. I remind myself to shut my brain off, open my ears and orientate to where this person is and how they feel about the work and the direction.



10am
Check It As You Go

I'm old school in that I still carry a notebook and pen with me to every meeting. I jot down key takeaways and capture items I need to tend to. I've got into the habit of using the 'checkbox approach' to physically check off a task. There's something so satisfying about that pen-to-paper mark; it makes me feel organised and accomplished.

2pm
Stick To The Plan

It's super important for me to have a plan. When I was diagnosed with cancer, the most unsettling time was before I had the chance to do my homework and didn't have a plan to battle it. Trusting our plan as a company to serve all runners and not lose focus or chase shiny things allowed us to get through the pandemic without laying anyone off. I often refer to a favourite quotation of mine: 'The secret to success is constancy of purpose.'

4pm
Run, Walk, Lift

For many years, a long run was absolute medicine to me. After treatment, I couldn't run at all. I missed it so much. Now I do long walks or walk/runs and have worked my runs up to 12 one-minute treadmill intervals. I also get some of that 'exhausted in a good way' feeling from lifting weights. I'm starting to feel that joy again that you get from exercising intensely.

9.30pm
Sleep… Usually

Because I wake early, I generally don't have much trouble falling asleep. But if I'm still figuring out how to connect the dots at work, I wake up at 2am thinking about it. I like these sorts of puzzles, but if I'm tired of not sleeping, I plug in my earphones and listen to a podcast – usually about history, music or business (such as *Pivot*); sometimes I distract myself with pure entertainment, like *Conan O'Brien Needs A Friend*.

ILLUSTRATION: JASON RAISH. PHOTOGRAPHY: JOBE LAWRENSON; STUDIO 33; GETTY IMAGES

The Best Pla

To Train In

20
Third Space
Various, London

THIRD SPACE

WORDS BY
SCARLETT WRENCH

aces 2023

A great gym should be more than just a place to sweat; it should inspire and empower. For men who want more from their workouts, *MH* has done the heavy lifting to compile this guide to the venues most worthy of your patronage

SIGN UP FOR…

- WEIGHT LIFTING
- MARTIAL ARTS
- BODY-WEIGHT MASTERY
- CARDIO BLAST
- FUNCTIONAL FITNESS
- BODY & MIND

01

WIT CrossFit

St Paul's, London

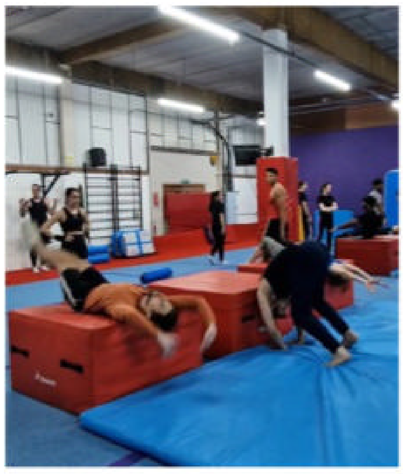
Global fitness retailer WIT started life as a Shoreditch pop-up, before launching its bricks-and-mortar shop-cum-CrossFit gym in 2017. And in 2023? WIT is more than just a brand, a shop, a nutrition bar *or* a gym. As well as world-class tuition (look out for MH Squad coach, Gus Vaz Tostes) and a broad range of classes, the gym also hosts regular events via its Outside The Box programme. Recent guests have included CrossFit GOATs such as Sara Sigmundsdóttir and Mat Fraser, as well as Hyrox champion Hunter McIntyre.

INSIDER TIP: Monthly memberships don't come cheap, but one-off classes can be bought for £20 and open gym passes for £17.50. Or you can enquire about a free trial sesh.

02

OverGravity

Bow, London



The rise of CrossFit has springboarded the popularity of gymnastics, but it's still far from mainstream. This adults-only club is on a mission to make it more accessible, flipping the idea that you need to start young on its head and helping anyone to get their first backflip. Classes include beginner-friendly tumbling, freestyle 'tricking', calisthenics and handstand practice. Over time, you'll build from basic jumps and rolls to advanced moves such as tornado kicks and muscle-ups.

INSIDER TIP: Already quite good? The gym is hosting workshops aimed at actors and stunt performers, with a focus on trickier moves that need hands-on guidance.

03

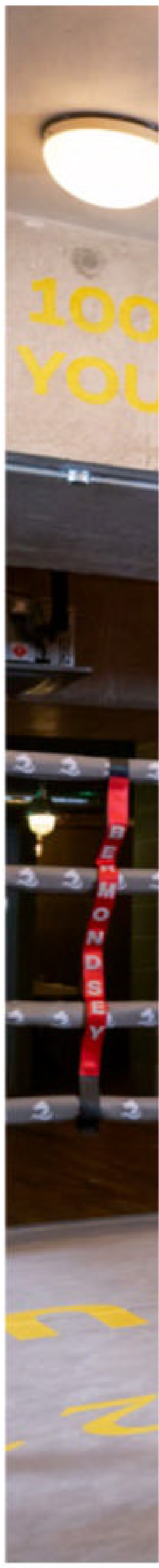
Move Forward Gym

Ottery St Mary, Exeter

The HQ of global fundraising event series Battle Cancer, Move Forward has ambitions far beyond boosting its members' PBs. The gym pioneered a 12-week training programme for those recovering from cancer, which is now being rolled out in venues across the UK, and has previously worked with military veterans and emergency services workers to improve mental health and build connections through exercise. Aside from that, it has a full roster of classes, comps, seminars and social events, as well as an on-site sports therapist, snack bar and workspace.

INSIDER TIP: Don't miss a sesh with head coach and ex-marine Hywel Thomas, who takes full advantage of the local area with army selection-style challenges on Woodbury Common and night hikes across Dartmoor.

TAKE STEPS TOWARDS YOUR HEALTH GOALS AT MOVE FORWARD GYM



IT'S TIME TO LIFT YOUR EXPECTATIONS

04

Black Country Barbell

Stourbridge, Dudley

When founder Lewis Majid set up this impressive strength-training space, he wanted it to be a destination gym: a spot that would attract gym-goers from across the UK, not just locals. And he succeeded: with its eye-catching branding, more than 30 barbells, plus all the racks, rigs, sleds and tyres you could want, it's a true lifter's playground. The gym has recently started hosting beginner-friendly powerlifting and weightlifting comps, while its 12-week coaching packages focus on educating clients in technique and nutrition, not just chasing aesthetics.

INSIDER TIP: Drop into one of BCB's new Learn to Lift workshops, which span disciplines such as powerlifting, Olympic lifting and bodybuilding.

% OF THE S
DON'T TAK
BERMONDSEY BOXING CLUB

05

Bermondsey Boxing Club

Bermondsey, London

From recreational boxers to competitive amateurs and aspiring pros, the boxing scene is punching hard right now. This recently launched site is part of the Rathbone and Camden Boxing Club family. The Bermondsey Club prides itself on the calibre of its coaches, with a curriculum crafted by sought-after British trainer Adam Booth and masterclasses with talent such as Johnny Nelson and George Groves. First-timers are welcome, but this isn't Boxercise... although the on-site smoothie bar and organic toiletries certainly help to soften the blows.

INSIDER TIP: The Clubs also host live fight screenings, so you can watch the pros compete from a more dynamic setting than the sofa in your front room.

THE SMART PLACE TO GET FIGHTING FIT

06

UFC Gym

Huntingdon Street, Nottingham

The first UK site under the global UFC Gym franchise opened in 2019 with a goal to turn fitness lovers into fighters. UFC Gym-accredited coaches teach a range of disciplines spanning MMA, boxing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, wrestling, kickboxing and muay Thai. Those who don't fancy getting jabbed can benefit from less pugilistic group fitness classes such as HIIT, yoga and spin, and there are well-stocked free weights and cardio areas, too. Chill out with a snack and a shake in the Armbar Café when you're done.

INSIDER TIP: Bring the kids. Youth classes start from age six, with a focus on coordination, speed, agility and strength. That is, if you don't mind getting taken down by your tweenager...

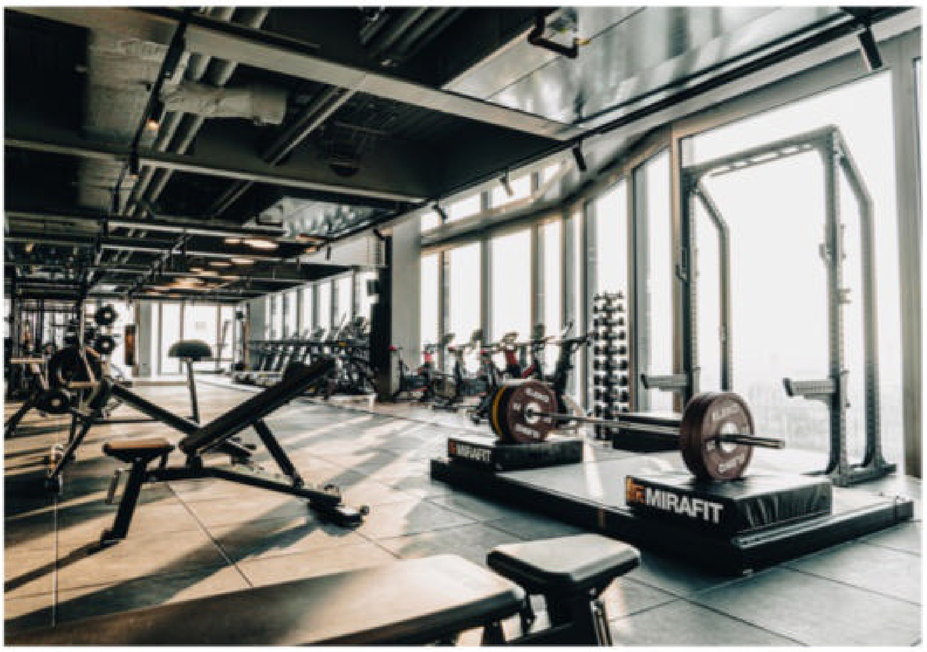
07

BXR City

Bishopsgate, London

'The highest gym in London' can be found on the 25th floor of the 22 Bishopsgate skyscraper – and the city views don't disappoint. Should you want to get a little higher than that, BXR also boasts a climbing wall, along with free weights, punch bags and cardio machines. And if you really want to dial up your metabolic burn, sign up for SweatCon: a gritty class created and led by MH Squad coach Faisal Abdalla, blending strength moves (split into push, pull, legs and core days) with lung-torching cardio blasts.

INSIDER TIP: If you're in search of an alternative burn, try BXR's popular VersaClimber class, a full-body calorie torcher. But make sure you move quickly: the class sells out every week.



08

The Castle Climbing Centre

Stoke Newington, London

Over the past decade, climbing has ascended from niche sport to global obsession. Situated between north London's Clissold Park and Woodbury Wetlands, The Castle is the UK's largest climbing centre, based in a converted Grade II listed Victorian water pumping station, complete with turrets. It offers more than 400 routes for bouldering, top-roping, lead-climbing and autobelay, and runs social events such as Coffee & Climb and LGBTQ+ evenings.

INSIDER TIP: If you're keen to fine-tune that climber's body, The Castle also hosts complementary classes, such as kinstretch and yoga, to bolster strength and mobility.

09

Grndhouse

Paddington, London

Grndhouse began as an online training platform, as its founders looked for a way to coach clients remotely during the pandemic using little more than bands and heavy dumbbells. The IRL studio launched last year, offering 40-minute workouts based on high-intensity resistance training (HIRT) – essentially bouts of weightlifting at a challenging but sustainable pace, for maximum muscle-building effect. If you're fond of the basics but lack the motivation for solo training, this is the place for you.

INSIDER TIP: If you only drop in for one class, make it Saturday's Grndhouse Hustle, a serious test of strength and stamina. You'll need to dig deep.

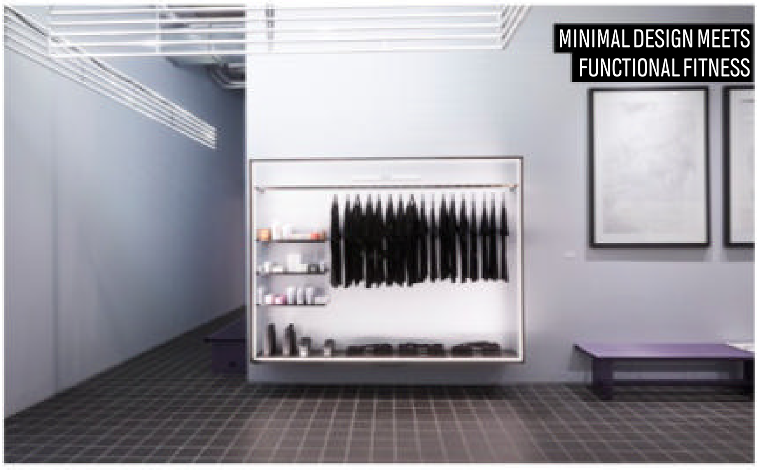
10

Blok

Ducie Street, Manchester; Clapton and Shoreditch, London

At Blok, form is just as important as function, and the Manchester studio's zen aesthetic and arty light installations have been shortlisted for a design award. The boutique studio chain also has a broad range of classes: everything from breathwork and yoga to TRX training, HIIT and boxing. There's a focus on core, flexibility and balance work, helping office workers unwind and iron out those kinks.

INSIDER TIP: Don't miss conscious breathing class BlokBreath with head of yoga Leo Oppenheim, one of the Manchester venue's most popular sessions.



MINIMAL DESIGN MEETS FUNCTIONAL FITNESS

FORDER'S GYM
BIRMINGHAM
FORDERS

11

Forder's Gym

Seafield Lane, Birmingham

Forder's is one of the first UK gyms to become an affiliate of Hyrox, a gruelling global endurance competition that blends functional fitness challenges with an 8km run. Head coach Darren Forder has previously qualified for the Hyrox World Championships – and he's on hand to help you boost your own rankings, too. The indoor and outdoor training spaces are kitted out with all the sleds, sandbags and ergs you could ever need, as well as a 1.2km track to help you build up some serious speed. The Forder's team coached 80 people to the most recent Hyrox event in Birmingham.

INSIDER TIP: Not quite ready for Hyrox, but still fancy putting your legs and lungs to the test? Forder's also runs its own team comp, Strive. Just remember, it's the winning, not the taking part, that counts...

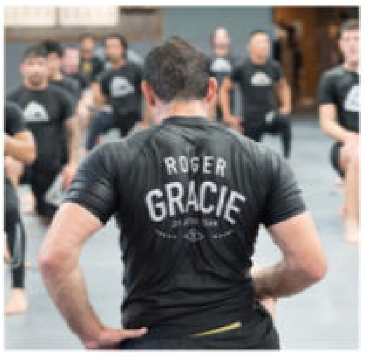
GET A DOSE OF SUN, SEA AND SANDY TRAINING

WHO DARES GYMS

12
Who Dares Gyms
Bournemouth, Dorset

■ Beach workouts aren't just for your annual fortnight in Corfu. Open from April (well, you might want a *little* sun, after all), this well-stocked functional fitness space on the south coast is operated with military efficiency by former special forces soldiers, including *SAS: Who Dares Wins*' Jason Fox. Enlist in the Commando Bootcamp and test your mettle with everything from tyre flips and sandbag drills to barbell work and SkiErg sprints. Your cool-down swim is free of charge, naturally…

INSIDER TIP: It's not just your muscles that benefit from a little strengthening. Last year, the team ran accompanying mindset training sessions, exploring goal-setting, resilience and emotional regulation.



13
Roger Gracie Academy
Hammersmith, London

■ Named for its founder, a 10-time jiu-jitsu world champion and grandson of the OG Carlos Gracie, this is the place to perfect your armbars and chokeholds. With more than 100 classes a week, you'll have a chance to learn under Roger himself. The gym also runs classes for kids and teens, plus kickboxing lessons.

INSIDER TIP: Want to watch the elite in action? Black belts and coaches battle it out in comp classes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons.

14
Heartcore
Various, London

■ Like yoga before it, Pilates is shaking off its 'one for the girls' image and belatedly gaining recognition for its benefits to core strength, posture and performance. In fact, one survey by fitness training provider HFE found 70% of Brits would pick it over yoga. And you'd struggle to find a better venue: Heartcore, which has seven London studios, blends abs-torching reformer-style sessions via its unique 'Coreformer' with mat work and a pinch of yoga for good measure (well, why not?).

INSIDER TIP: Want to try before you travel? Sign up for a trial of Heartcore's on-demand virtual classes to stretch, bend and flow your way to a better-moving body.

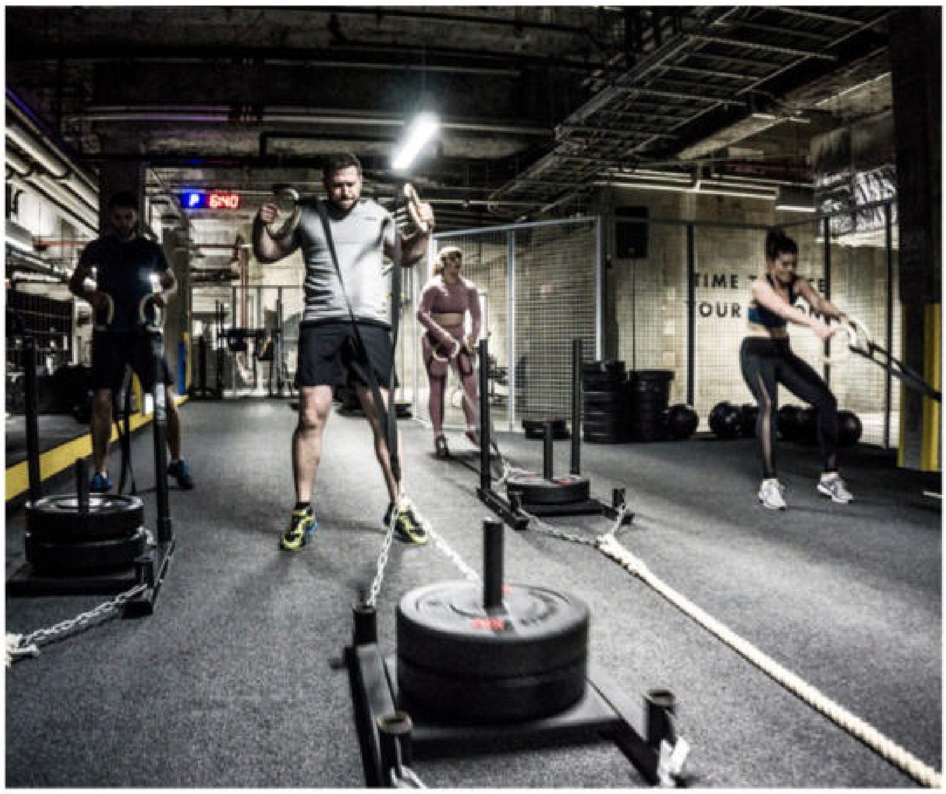
PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM WATKINS (THIRD SPACE, FARM FITNESS URBAN, BERMONDSEY BOXING CLUB); BERTIE OAKS (STEEL WARRIORS); JERRY SUN (TRACKMAFIA); MAX OPPENHEIM (FORDERS GYM)

15
TrackMafia
Paddington, London

Set up by three friends – Cory, Jules and Jeggi – TrackMafia started off as an informal meet-up between like-minded runners who wanted to get used to the discomfort of speedwork. Today, the club runs free sessions at Paddington Rec every Thursday at 6.30pm, and this summer marks its 10-year anniversary. Inclusivity is the club's MO, and it strives to create a welcoming environment for women, people of colour and anyone intimidated by track running. If building power, speed and new friendships is on your wish list for 2023, this is the place to do it.

INSIDER TIP: If you've no trips to London planned, catch coach Cory Wharton-Malcolm on Apple Fitness+, where he'll motivate you on the toughest of runs.

THIS RUNNING TRACK HAS SPACE FOR ALL



16
Manor MCP
Pimlico, London

Based in a former car park, this subterranean gym was conceived as an antidote to the 'safe, soft, easy' convenience of modern city living. (Unofficial hashtag: #BeAFuckingMonster.) Workouts incorporate classic strongman moves utilising kegs, logs, sledgehammers and tyres, while its Gas Tank class goes heavy on the cardio to really ramp up the metabolic demands. Need a spot to work as well as work out? The gym sits below Thomas House co-working space.

INSIDER TIP: Even beasts need R&R. Manor's new Recover class focuses on mobility work and lower-intensity efforts, while it also hosts ice-bath and breath-control workshops.

Britain's Best Gyms

17
Foundry
Various, London

It's no secret that personal trainers are expensive – particularly so in the bigger cities like London. But one-on-one tuition can transform your performance and accelerate your skill acquisition in a way that no HIIT class can. Bridging the gap, Foundry is leading the way in small-group personal training (SGPT) sessions, which can be booked through the gym's app alongside regular classes, for tailored training at a nicer price point. There are five sites – including newly opened Richmond and North Kensington – but 4,000 sq ft Vauxhall is the standout.

INSIDER TIP: Try the Foundry's signature Strong class, which blends moves such as prowler pushes, log presses and axle bar zerchers. Don't know 'em? You'll soon be acquainted…

18
Steel Warriors
Lambeth, Tower Hamlets and Haringey, London

This outdoor gym was founded by an anti-knife crime charity, which melts weapons taken off the streets and recycles the steel to build calisthenics rigs – then offers young people a place to train and socialise, safely. Ruskin Park – one of three locations, all intentionally positioned in gang neutral zones to boost participation – has become an iconic spot, known for its freestyle displays and talented attendees. Next up, Steel Warriors is looking at ways to offer free PT qualifications to members of its community.

INSIDER TIP: A brand-new initiative from the SW team, Calisseum is a non-profit set up to allow people of all abilities to take part in calisthenics tournaments throughout the year. What's your excuse?

19
CrossFit Huntsman
Hertford, Hertfordshire

The location of many a *Men's Health* fitness shoot, Huntsman is a team favourite for good reason. An inclusive, community-focused gym – with a second location in Bishop's Stortford – the 5,000 sq ft facility is based in a converted industrial barn, so you'll never be short of space to swing a kettlebell, snatch a bar or flop a muscle-up. Its key selling point is the on-site Monday Muscle coffee house and nutrition hub, which offers personalised eating plans to help you meet your goals, as well as the best bagels you'll ever eat in a CrossFit box.

INSIDER TIP: Want to become a clean-and-jerk master? Sign up for Barbell Engineering, a small-group class run by British Weightlifting-certified coaches 'Thorny' and 'Saff'.

20
Third Space
Various, London

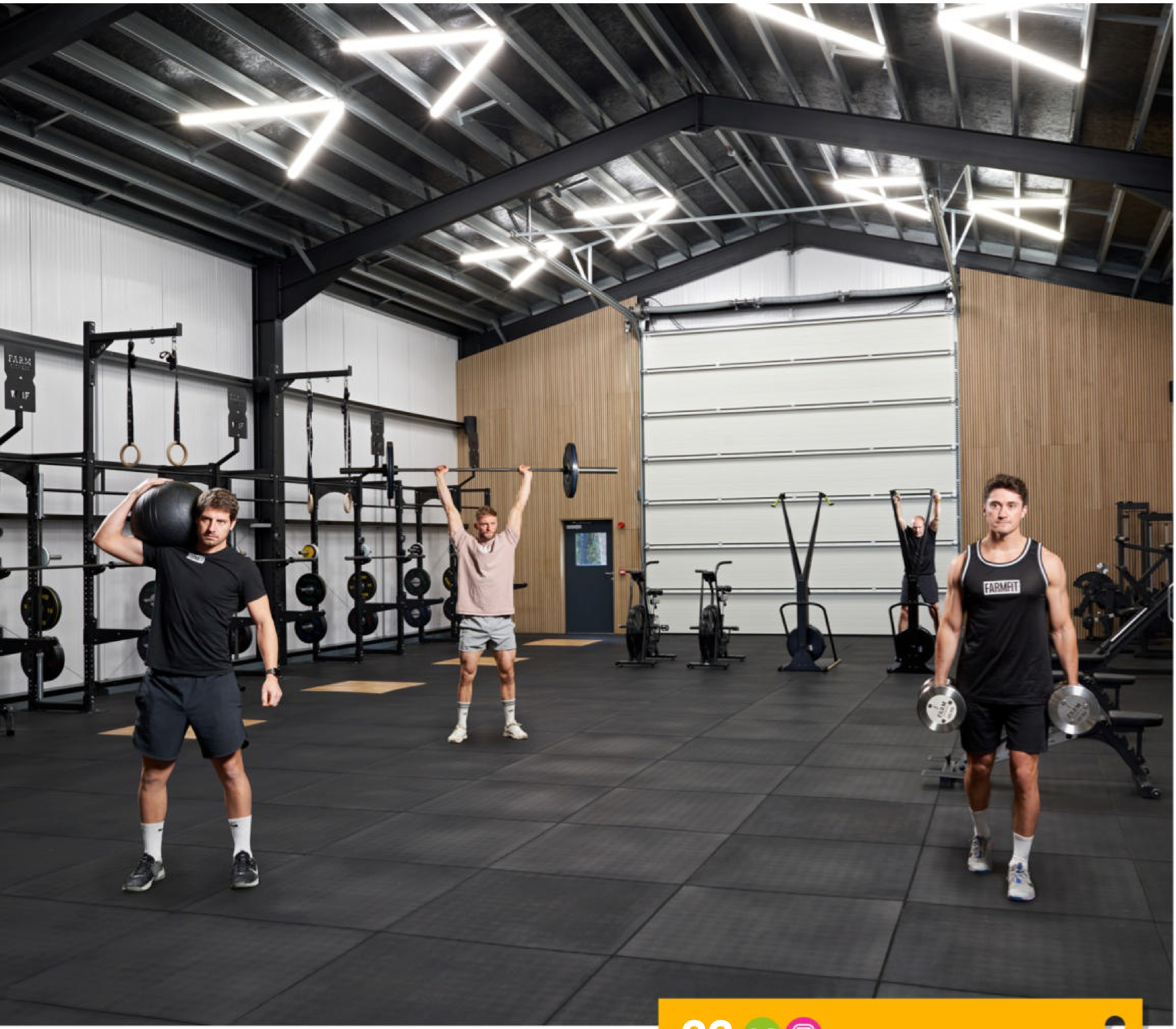
The newly launched Moorgate site is the eighth location of the high-end chain. Stand-out features include a combat cage for martial arts training and a top-end spin studio with ICG tech, which integrates your real-time stats into on-screen race displays. Or head to the Canary Wharf site – 'Europe's largest luxury health club' – which boasts a 13m climbing wall with 25 routes to tackle. You won't miss your other spaces.

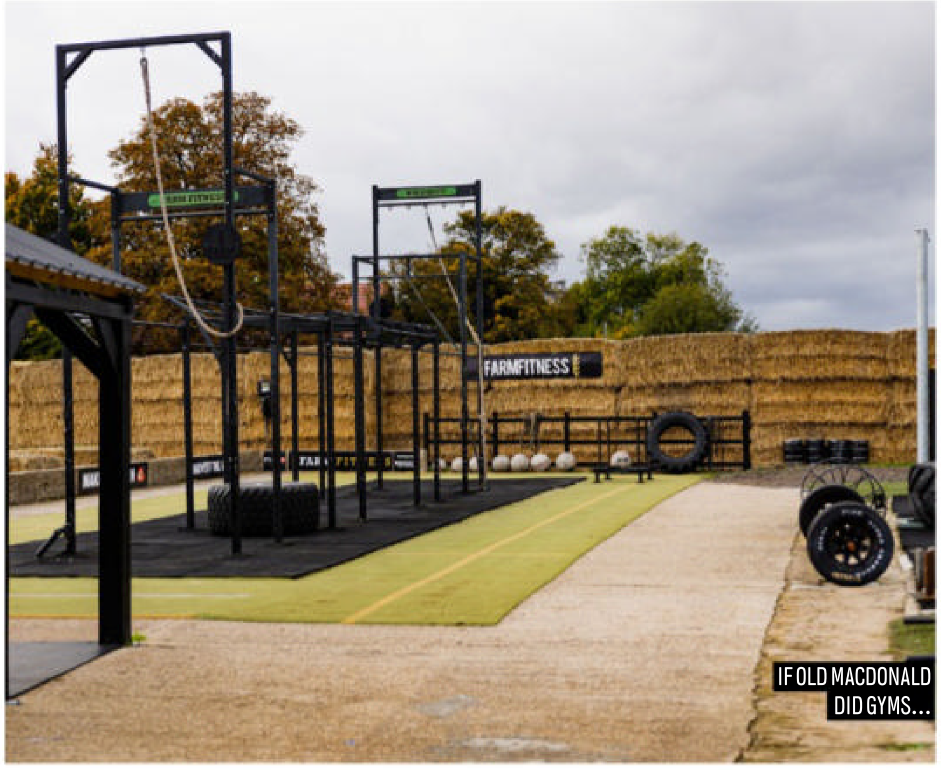
INSIDER TIP: You can throw a kettlebell around anywhere. Third Space's real selling point is its luxury, including such touches as a backlit 'Himalayan salt wall' sauna, a menthol-infused steam room and a hydrotherapy pool.

21
Circuit Society
St Alban's, Hertfordshire; Camden, London

The newly launched 'microstudio' franchise (there are more sites to come) has ambitions to cater to remote workers in underserved residential areas, who want a fast, effective workout without having to schlep into a city. Class sizes are small and each session is 45 minutes long, with circuits combining staple strength-building moves and cardio kit such as SkiErgs and echo bikes. Not fully confident about your form? A video screen in front of each station will show you how it's done.

INSIDER TIP: Pick up a post-workout shake from the NUA (Nothing Unnecessary Added) health bar and supp it on the mezzanine while you browse your emails and pretend to your boss that you're sat at your desk.





IF OLD MACDONALD DID GYMS…

22

Farm Fitness Urban

Dunmow, Essex

The open-air gym installed on founder Tom Kemp's family farm is a long-time *MH* favourite, with pastoral views that'll almost distract you from your burning quads. But its latest feature qualifies it for a fresh spot on our list: installed in one of the site's vast derelict farm buildings, Farm Fitness Urban is a sprawling indoor gym with six Eleiko weightlifting platforms, hoards of functional kit and cardio machines, plus a fancy shakes station.

INSIDER TIP: Competitive types can sign up for the Farm Games, a unique event that makes use of the yard, indoor gym and surrounding woodland. Harvest those gains!

Man Versus Food

DISCOUNT
PASTA
30%
OFF

Diet culture has always been curiously gendered. Self-restraint, abnegation, mad regimens, fad science – these were once thought the preserve of 'neurotic' women. **But something has shifted. From keto to paleo, experimental fasters to tech-bro biohackers, today's food ascetics are looking distinctly... male.** Do you see yourself on the scales? And if so, **how did we become what we don't eat?**

AN ABSTEMIOUS APPROACH TO EATING IS GATHERING NEW MOMENTUM AMONG MEN

Words by Richard Godwin | Illustrations by Klaus Kremmerz

Back in the autumn of 2016, shortly after the Donald Trump election, I drove from Los Angeles to San Francisco to interview seven young men who had started a tech company. At least, it looked like a tech start-up – but the founders were more interested in their personal biological hardware than computers or phones. 'We're looking at the body as a system with a set of inputs,' they explained to me. 'You can modulate those inputs for a predictable set of outputs.'

What they were selling was nootropic pills – 'apps for the mind' – designed to make you smarter, fitter, more efficient, more focused and in control. But I found myself just as interested in their diets, which they had adopted with more or less the same objectives. One of them performed a 60-hour fast every week. Another consumed all his daily calories within a one-hour window each day. A few of the others communally fasted from Monday evening to Wednesday morning. All of this was tracked with a mix of spreadsheets, glucose monitors, fitness trackers, calorie counters, pulse oximeters, Slack groups and Subreddits. My photographer came back from his encounter with them shaking his head. 'Wow,' he said. 'Those nootropics guys have some serious eating disorders.'

I've thought about those men – and that comment – a lot these past few years. What struck me then as a very niche, very techy, very – how to put this? – male approach to food has begun to permeate the mainstream. We've seen it in meal replacement solutions such as Soylent, the optimally engineered 'anti-food' developed by San Francisco software engineer Rob Rhinehart; or the slightly more palatable British equivalent, Huel, available in supermarkets and petrol stations up and down the country. We've seen it in the extreme protocols gaining large (and largely male) followings: the caveman diet, the carnivore diet, the keto diet. We've seen the emergence of outlandish male food personalities such as the Liver King (1.7 million Instagram followers), who thinks the crisis in modern masculinity would be solved if we all ate more raw offal – not to mention Bible influencer Jordan Peterson and his legendary all-beef diet. Meanwhile, we've seen the vegan diet repositioned as a macho protocol thanks to the Netflix documentary *The Game Changers*. Going plant-based will (it is claimed) do wonders for your erections. It's all a curious mix of ideology and evangelism: my science is better than your science; my expert knows better than your expert.

In among this flurry of A/B testing and supplement pop-ups, good old-fashioned word of mouth has done its thing, too. Food, I find, frequently comes up in conversation. Like my mate Damian, 44, who allows no food to pass his lips before 7pm each day. He was inspired by a dad at his kid's nursery who had exchanged a 'tubby dad bod' for a six-pack through a regimen of intermittent fasting and weight training. Damian went online and – how many 21st-century stories begin like this? – started his own research.

'I was really taken with what he was telling me, about how your body doesn't need about 40% of what we eat,' Damian says. 'He was describing this experience of becoming more alive, more awake to the world. We're animals; we're designed to be quick and light. Most people say, 'I can't miss breakfast, I'd be a mess!' Actually? You can miss breakfast. You're designed to miss breakfast.'

Damian skipped breakfast and lunch every day for a couple of years and says he'd recommend it (with the caveat that he could become a bit of a monster at 6pm). He lost a few excess kilos, but that wasn't the point. 'It made me appreciate the food I was eating,' he says. 'I liked the feeling of being in control. I liked not having that fogginess. I saved tons of time. And it was a life experience that taught me how much I need.'

'Paleo, keto and carnivore diets tap into this idea that men control their own bodies'

The New Masculinity

What's curious about all of this is that prior to 2016, I don't think I had a single conversation about diet with any of my male friends. Ever. No doubt this has a lot to do with the fact that when you reach a certain age, your hangovers become crueller, your metabolism slows and you can't burn through food like you did when you were 17. But it was also because, well, dieting was something women did. It conjured images of mums drinking SlimFast and influencers such as Ella Woodward posing with kale. Men were more likely to talk about how much they drank than how much – or how little – they ate.

That has now emphatically changed, says nutritionist Ian Marber – and not necessarily in a healthy way. He feels that male diet culture is displaying the worst excesses of female diet culture of the recent past. 'There's a kind of machismo, which feels really outdated to me, that is alive and well on Instagram and online marketing,' he says. 'It's the equivalent of the marketing about beauty, weight and fitness directed to women in the 90s. It feels prehistoric. But somehow, it's working.'

For Marber, influencer culture is one of the primary drivers. He describes a young male personal trainer who approached him recently, asking for advice on how to monetise his large Instagram following. 'It was so glaringly obvious. If he posed with his shirt off, he'd get 3,000 likes. If he did the same pose with his shirt on, he'd get 300 likes. The advertisers obviously understand this. The algorithm understands it.' He says it's no surprise that there are 'thousands' of fitness influencers offering 'bullshit' diet advice or flogging protein shakes and zinc supplements of dubious merit. 'They get thousands of likes for posing with their shirts off. But it's not because of what they're eating. It's because they're hot,' Marber says. The truth of the matter is, we're far more likely to take advice from someone we aspire to be than someone who's qualified to offer it.

Marber points to a shift in the culture that's often missed in contemporary media discussions about gender. To read the comment pages of our newspapers, you might imagine that every young person in Britain had dispensed with gender and was now living in some kind of non-binary unisex utopia. But this is far from the case. The female

Competitive Eaters

A LITTLE NUTRITIONAL KNOWLEDGE GOES A LONG WAY. DON'T OVERTHINK IT

ideal has converged on something that the American writer Jia Tolentino termed Instagram Face: a 'distinctly white but ambiguously ethnic' composite of Kim Kardashian, Bella Hadid, Emily Ratajkowski and Kendall Jenner, wearing a 'sexy baby tiger look'. Social media algorithms, make-up tutorials, photo-editing software such as FaceTune and ever more accessible cosmetic surgery have all helped create this aesthetic. Dating apps have surely compounded it. Any woman who signs up to Hinge or Tinder effectively volunteers to have themselves judged on a fleeting glimpse of a 2D image.

There are precisely the same forces at work on men, too – only with different emphasis. It's whey powder rather than lip fillers; muscle mass rather than (or as well as) weight loss; and rather than Instagram Face, it's more like Instagram Body. Maybe you prefer your figurine with the extravagant facial hair and ponytail of the Liver King. Maybe he has the sculpted quiff and precision stubble of *Love Island* winner Davide Sanclimenti. But he certainly has the same musculature, prominent abs, pecs, biceps and inguinal creases. 'Whenever I do talks in schools, almost without exception, the boys are into protein, muscles and abs,' Marber says. 'There's no shame or hesitation. It's just expected. They're buying protein shakes in their teens. They're doing keto and intermittent fasting in their twenties. We're veering towards a *Love Island* aesthetic becoming the norm. All of those diets that you mentioned – paleo, keto, carnivore – tap into this idea that men are powerful, muscular Masters of the Universe who can control their own bodies. It's the complete opposite of acceptance.'

The aesthetic pressures on women are arguably stronger. (I mean, we have semi-regular female prime ministers now, and yet: can you imagine a woman as overweight as Boris Johnson making it to the top job? I cannot.) However, women have lived with these pressures for far longer than men and have better developed defences. There is a lively literature critiquing female beauty standards, from *Fat Is A Feminist Issue* by Susie Orbach to *Hunger* by Roxane Gay. There is a wider recognition that obsessive calorie counting leads to joyless anxiety at best and life-threatening eating disorders at worst. Ad campaigns aimed at women now celebrate 'body diversity', while magazine articles celebrate the 'anti-diet' backlash. 'The anti-diet movement is about not being a victim of diet culture any more,' one dietitian told our sister publication, *Women's Health*. 'I think in many ways it's a female fight because women are so often targeted by the diet industry. Women especially end up tying their self-worth to how they look, and the diet industry teaches us that that's what matters most.' Men, however, seem to be saying, 'Bring it on!'

Gurus And Prophets

So how to attain this ideal physique? This is a matter of ideological debate. For it isn't just the visual culture that has changed. Lee Amico, a personal trainer who offers nutrition coaching from his gym in Hertfordshire, says that his male clients now come in full of diet chat that they've picked up from podcasts such as *The Joe Rogan Experience* or *The Tim Ferriss Show*. 'The general population are now being exposed to guests and "experts" talking about how they got into shape,' he says. 'They buy into that gospel and become their own prophet for that religion. They listen, they think, "That makes sense," then they start telling people – and it spreads and spreads.'

The carnivore diet – in which you eat nothing but meat (ideally plenty of organ meat) – is the one they talk about most. Amico sees it as quintessentially male in its brute simplicity, its competitive element ('how long did you last?'), its excess (eat as much meat as you can!), its pseudoscientific underpinnings and the way it harks back to an idealised past when men were men. It also has an element of clickbait to it. 'It's extreme enough to get people clicking. It's extreme enough to keep people reading. And it's extreme enough to get people trying. It appeals to that caveman in all of us.'

And here's the thing – you'll get near instant results, too. You'll feel different almost instantly, and pretty soon you'll look different, too. 'You're taking a whole food source out of your diet. You're restricting your carbs, so that's loads of calories. So you'll see quick results and you'll say: "Oh my god,

A BALANCE BETWEEN TEMPERANCE AND INDULGENCE IS THE SUREST PATH TO SUSTAINABLE RESULTS

this works!"' Amico explains. And in a marketplace of ideas, quick results are more appealing than slow, laborious, incremental ones. But they don't tend to be sustainable. 'What you find is people bottom out after four weeks tops. And they go back to where they were.'

Still, Amico doesn't necessarily think that invalidates the experiment. 'If it does flip someone's focus into nutrition, then that's not all bad,' he says. 'They might realise their plate doesn't need to be full of chips or potatoes – and then they might reduce their carbohydrate intake. They might start eating more lean meat rather than sausages and burgers. If you're willing to open your mind up enough, you will pick up some gems on the way.' Traditionally, he points out, men have approached the business of getting in shape via training rather than nutrition. But the thing is, nutrition is far more important. 'It's not only about aesthetic goals – getting slimmer or building muscle mass – it's about health markers, too. Nutrition moves the markers much more than exercise alone. I see a lot of people start the gym and they get so far. But it's when they start looking at their food that they make the big leaps.'

Hacking Our Biology

The aesthetic marketplace is not the only competition that we 21st-century men are engaged in, though. The men at the San Francisco-based nootropics company I visited didn't seem too bothered about looking like *Love Island* contestants – but they were obsessed with establishing a competitive advantage over their fellow start-ups. They wanted to make better, smarter, faster decisions. Such are the pressures of the modern economy. For them, diet was a way of improving their minds as much as their bodies.

> 'We're far more likely to take advice from someone we aspire to be'

It didn't entirely work, in that their company folded. A peer-reviewed study showed that its pills didn't do what they claimed – and so they ceased production. Live by the science, die by the science. But I did look up one of the founders, Michael Brandt, and found his quest for self-control still ongoing. 'A lot of times when we eat food, we're not eating it as food,' he tells me. 'We eat when we're anxious or depressed or stressed.' When we're bored, too, I'd add. 'I completely agree. I think the intermittent fasting movement is a response to that. It's not really about calories. I just want to be able to control my own monkey brain.' These days, he's selling a drink called Ketone-IQ, funded by the US Military and endorsed by Gwyneth Paltrow, no less. Each serving contains 10g of ketones, which is the chemical that your liver produces as an alternative energy supply when you restrict carbohydrates, the body's usual source of fuel. The idea is that drinking a shot of this every few hours provides all the purported benefits of the keto diet – increased mental clarity, faster fat-burning – without you actually having to follow the diet. Sounds great, right?

In the intervening years, Brandt tells me that he's tried just about every diet imaginable. The carnivore diet was 'interesting', he tells me. 'I actually felt quite good. Whatever else you can say about meat, humans have been living off it forever – and it is very nutrient-dense, especially if you're eating nose-to-tail, liver, tongue and so on.' Still, he only lasted a couple of weeks. He did better on keto, but his favourite was a week-long water fast, which he describes as 'a very spiritual experience'. 'At a low level of blood glucose, your brain can't function that well, so your body starts converting fat to ketones,' he says. 'It was cool to see how I'd survive in a starvation context.'

This was all part of what I suppose we'd have to call Brandt's nutritional journey. And it's a journey that he says has helped him to find equilibrium. Nowadays, he simply (simply!) omits all carbohydrates at breakfast and lunch and eats what he wants at dinner time. 'I wasn't obese or anorexic before. I was just thoughtless,' he says. 'I knew that candy and alcohol were bad for me, but I still drank and ate it. Now I'm very mindful of how carbs and sugar make me feel. I'm sure I was feeling these swings before, I just didn't have the perceptual awareness of them.' The idea of all this self-experimentation, he stresses, is not to spend your entire life mapping your biomarkers on Google Sheets. The idea is to find out what exactly works for your body, so you can gain

a measure of control over it. ‘There’s a way of doing it that’s obsessive and controlling and counterproductive,’ he says. ‘And there’s a way to underdo it, too, when you’re shoving whatever into your mouth. But there is a sweet spot.’

Finding What Works

My own experience bears that out – up to a point. I’ve tried a few outlandish diets in my time. I once did a week-long juice cleanse at the behest of *Vogue* and a ‘dopamine fast’ that required me to ingest absolutely nothing (no food, media or conversation) for 36 hours. I’ve also kept my wife company on an enigmatic lose-a-stone-in-a-week diet that she found on the internet just before she turned 40 (lots of grapefruit and eggs). I’ve invariably found these experiments interesting. I’ve found I don’t need carbs nearly as much as I think I do, and you can get back a lot of time and money if you swap a lunchtime trip to Pret for a cinnamon-swirl-flavoured Huel. Also: it’s actually quite a relief to cede control to some higher authority, even if it’s just some dude on the internet. Diets help you with that.

But still, up to a point. I was rather taken with Brandt’s Ketone drink and its promise to support mental clarity. Only, on my second morning of drinking it, I inexplicably fainted and lost a whole two days of work. So much for efficiency. I’ve also tried my friend Damien’s fast – only to find myself feeling distracted all day and binge-eating in the evening. The more you consciously think about it, the more you obsess, and the more out of control it feels. I can’t help thinking that I was intuitively eating much better when I wasn’t thinking about my inputs and outputs all the time. Overall, it’s basic things that make the difference – picking wholemeal bread, an apple instead of a Snickers, maybe not eating a Five Guys on the way home, etc. But no one wants me to talk about that on a podcast.

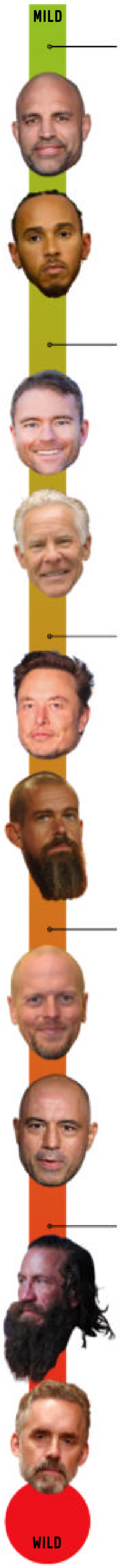
And is all this focus on nutrition even reaching the men who need it? Nutritionist Rob Hobson doesn’t think so. ‘The men most influenced by the keto diet and the paleo diet tend to be the “worried well”, those with an interest in improving their physique or athletic performance in some way,’ he says. ‘But it’s easy to fall into the trap of focusing on men who are already fit and looking to get healthier, leaner or improve their performance while having little weight to really lose.’ Here is a sobering fact: 68% of men are overweight or obese in the UK*. ‘This is the group that needs the most help,’ says Hobson. He points to studies that show a significant number of men perceive weight loss as a ‘feminised’ space and are reluctant to talk about it with friends. Some are in denial about weight problems, reflecting a broader social acceptance of overweight men than women. ‘These men often do nothing about their weight until they receive an alarming diagnosis from their doctor.’

As for the ‘worried well’ – well, true enlightenment comes from accepting certain things are beyond your control. But it might also be a question of being honest about why we do all this. As for my mate Damian? He’s into bodybuilding now. ‘[Intermittent fasting] was an ongoing experiment into how I felt, what I needed and what I wanted,’ he says. ‘But this?’ he says, referring to his new musculature. ‘This is cosmetic. I want my muscles to look like this.’

So the reason is… vanity? He laughs. ‘It makes you feel great, it gives you a routine and a process, and it makes you feel strong. I mean, there are practical advantages – but that’s not really why you do it,’ he laughs. ‘My body is now as close as I’ll ever get to Brad Pitt in *Fight Club*. That was the goal.’ And who am I to judge?

The Dietary Prophets

Not all prescriptive diets are harmful, but celeb endorsements shouldn’t swing it for you. Here’s your primer on five popular plans



Veganism
Poster bros: James Wilks, Lewis Hamilton
Wilks’ *The Game Changers* introduced veganism to a new audience by focusing on strength and, er, harder erections. Some claims have been questioned, but it can be a balanced diet.

Paleo
Poster bros: Robb Wolf, Mark Sisson
Based on foods available to early man, the ‘caveman’ diet (about which both Wolf and Sisson have written books) is unlikely to harm you. Then again, neither is a piece of toast.

Intermittent Fasting
Poster bros: Elon Musk, Jack Dorsey
Both Musk and Dorsey are firm believers of eating within a time-restricted window. Overnight fasts of 16 hours are generally considered safe, but Dorsey’s seven-meals-a-week plan sounds dismal.

Keto
Poster bros: Tim Ferriss, Joe Rogan
This diet, arguably popularised by Ferriss’s appearance on Rogan’s podcast, is high in fat and low in carbs (including fruit and veg). Some people find it beneficial, but adherence is difficult.

Carnivore
Poster bros: The Liver King, Jordan Peterson
Peterson purportedly eats nothing but beef and salt, while the Liver King preaches the benefits of eating raw offal. Approach with caution and consult a (qualified) expert.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES. *SOURCE: NHS HEALTH SURVEY 2019

35 SMART WAYS TO LOSE 7KG BY MARCH

If the science of weight loss is simple, the application is anything but. ‘Moving more and eating less’ has a lot to do with it – **but the real transformation takes place inside your brain.** If you’re running short on inspiration, we’ve compiled a tasting menu of tips and tricks to fire you up and help you towards your goals. **Sample them all – and see what sticks**

WORDS BY SCARLETT WRENCH - PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROWAN FEE →

7KG

03 *MOTIVATIONAL* READS

Prescriptive 300-page fat-loss manuals rarely make for good bedtime reading. Try one of these instead

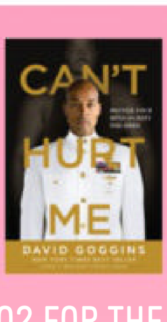
Ottolenghi
SIMPLE

01 FOR THE FRUSTRATED CHEF

OTTOLENGHI SIMPLE

BY YOTAM OTTOLENGHI

We all know that home-cooked meals have health and weight-loss benefits. But even for the culinarily inclined, it can often feel too time-consuming and labour-intensive. Packed with 30-minute recipes, one-pot wonders and easy meal-prep inspo, this book will take some of the fuss out of eating well.

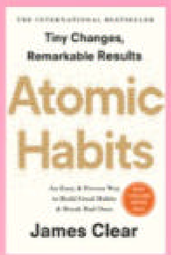


02 FOR THE DEMOTIVATED ATHLETE

CAN'T HURT ME

BY DAVID GOGGINS

After a difficult childhood, Goggins – who struggled with depression and his weight – remoulded himself into an elite Navy Seal and a top endurance athlete. Here, he explains why most of us tap into just 40% of our potential. Take inspiration for your own personal battles.



03 FOR THE AMATEUR PSYCHOLOGIST

ATOMIC HABITS

BY JAMES CLEAR

If maintaining healthy habits is a daily struggle, this bestselling book will help you surmount the obstacles standing between you and your goals. Clear provides evidence-based strategies for understanding willpower, rebooting motivation and making good decisions second nature.

7KG
DAVID GOGGINS CAN'T HURT ME
Atomic Habits
James Clear
OTTOLENGHI SIMPLE

07 ACRONYMS WORTH *MEMORISING*

These days, it can feel like the fitness world is riddled with jargon. Don't know your DOMS from your ROM*? Memorise these to give your efforts an edge

01

CICO

CALORIES IN, CALORIES OUT

The basic principle on which weight loss is founded. When we burn more calories than we take in, our body taps into its stored fat for energy. However, that doesn't mean calories are all that count; ensuring you get enough protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals makes the process less painful.

02

HIIT

HIGH-INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING

HIIT is a time-efficient way to blast through calories. Try pushing to your max on an AirBike or SkiErg for 10 secs, then easing up to a recovery pace for 50 secs for 10 rounds in total. A tip: leave a day's recovery between sessions.

03

LISS

LOW-INTENSITY STEADY-STATE

Less trendy, perhaps, but this training style is still perfectly good for fitness, fat loss and your overall wellbeing.

DIGITAL MANIPULATION: SCRATCHINPOST.CO.UK. *THAT'S 'DELAYED ONSET MUSCLE SORENESS' AND 'RANGE OF MOTION', FYI

04

EPOC

EXCESS POST-EXERCISE OXYGEN CONSUMPTION

AKA 'afterburn': the process by which your body continues to burn extra calories once your workout's over, similar to how a light bulb remains hot once switched off. Movements that engage your fast-twitch muscles (box jumps, burpees, kettlebell swings), performed at a high intensity, are great for this.

05

BMR

BASAL METABOLIC RATE

That is, the calories you burn at rest. One way to raise your BMR? Increase your muscle mass. Pound for pound, it uses up more calories than fat mass.

06

EMOM

EVERY MINUTE, ON THE MINUTE

A fat-torching protocol in which you complete one set of an exercise per minute, then move on to the next. So if a set of 10 thrusters takes you 40 secs, you'd rest for the remaining 20 secs before moving on to, say, 10 burpees.

07

AMRAP

AS MANY ROUNDS AS POSSIBLE

This brutal time-limited workout protocol asks you to perform a circuit exactly as the acronym suggests. Just don't neglect quality reps for quantity.

01

THING THAT *DOESN'T WORK*

Lifting off weight in a way that's sustainable – and not miserable – is as much about avoiding pitfalls as adopting habits. Fitness editor Andrew Tracey shares a word of advice

The success of others leaves clues, but imitation can be the quickest route to failure when it comes to your fitness journey. It's understandably tempting to look at someone who's achieved incredible results – be that in weight loss, muscle gain or improved performance – and want to copy their approach, verbatim. But it's important to remember that the same water that softens the potato hardens the egg. An approach that seemingly led to effortless success for one person may wind up being an unworkable slog for another – whether it's due to different lifestyles, cultural conditioning or just plain preferences (you don't have to love chicken and broccoli, but loving pizza and ice cream a little bit less gives you a major leg-up, for sure). I've seen people with entirely comparable lives – similar commitments, time constraints and upbringings – fail to follow a plan that another breezed through, just through sheer differences in taste and enjoyment.

The fix? Crowdsource as widely as you can, looking for tips, titbits, routines and rituals that are already pretty close to the way you live now, or at least those you suspect you'll find sustainable. Use these to optimise your current lifestyle, rather than trying to mimic someone else's.

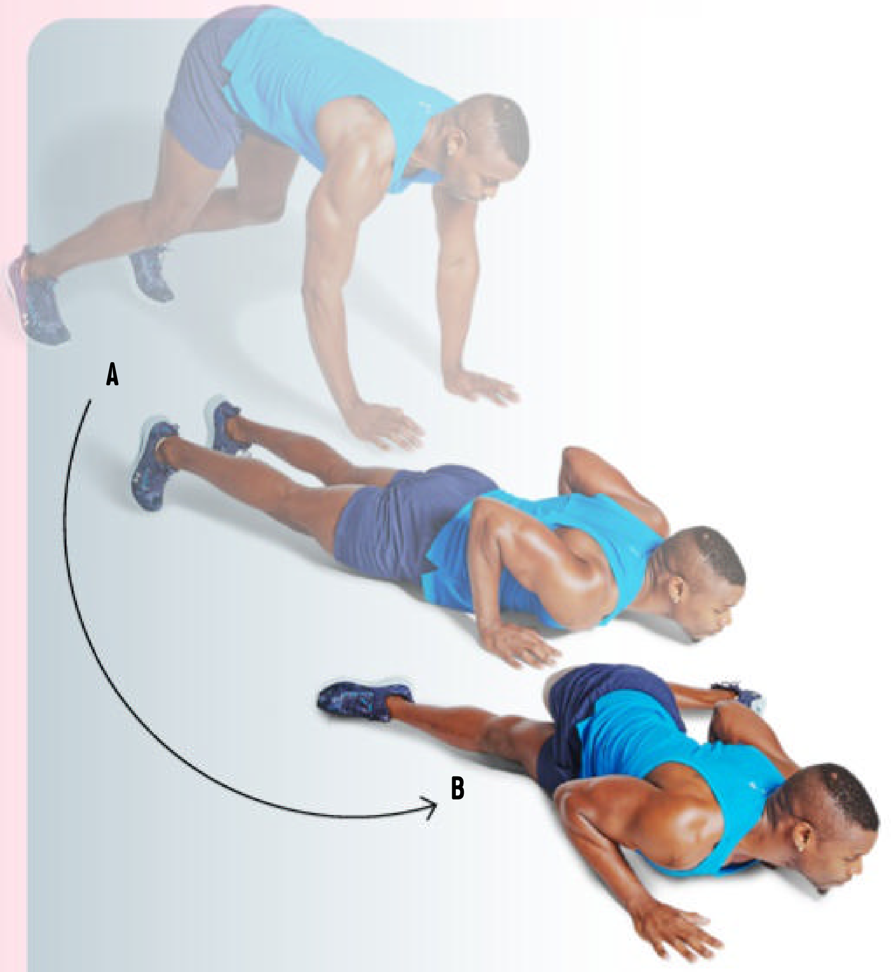
THE ULTIMATE 07-MIN SWEATS

On days when time has got the better of you, blast through one of these microworkouts from strength and conditioning coach Juan Guadarrama. The first will help you maintain muscle (a big contributor to your metabolic rate), while the second culls calories and boosts fitness. We've got your back

DIRECTIONS

Take on one of these two workouts six days a week. Whichever you pick, start each with one minute of the warm-up move below. For the dumbbell workout, pick a medium weight and do two rounds, resting for 60 secs between rounds. For the body-weight blast, set a timer for 6 mins, then do each of the moves in order. Complete as many rounds as possible, resting only when necessary. Aim to do 5 rounds.

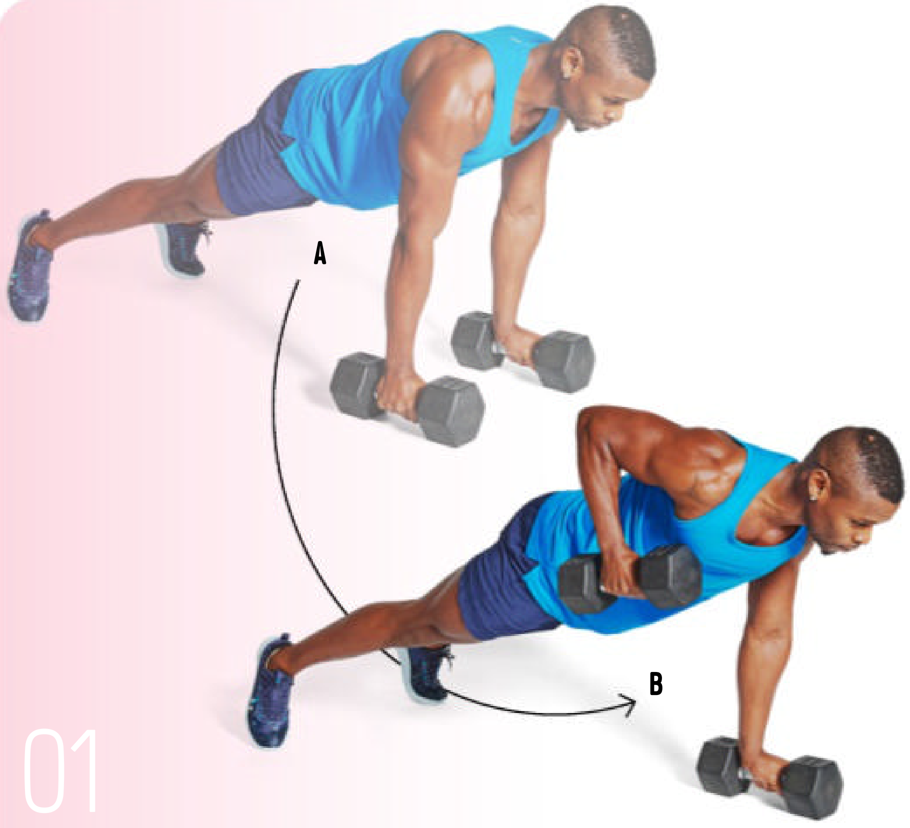
▶ A\ WARM-UP



INCHWORM TO SCORPION

Start standing. Lean forwards and place your hands on the floor, bending your knees just slightly (**A**). Walk your hands forwards until you're in press-up position, then lower your chest to the floor. Lift your right leg and reach it over to the left, touching your right foot to the floor (**B**). Return to press-up position and repeat on the other side. Reverse the movements to stand up. That's 1 rep; do reps for 60 secs.

▶ B\ 01 DUMBBELL WORKOUT

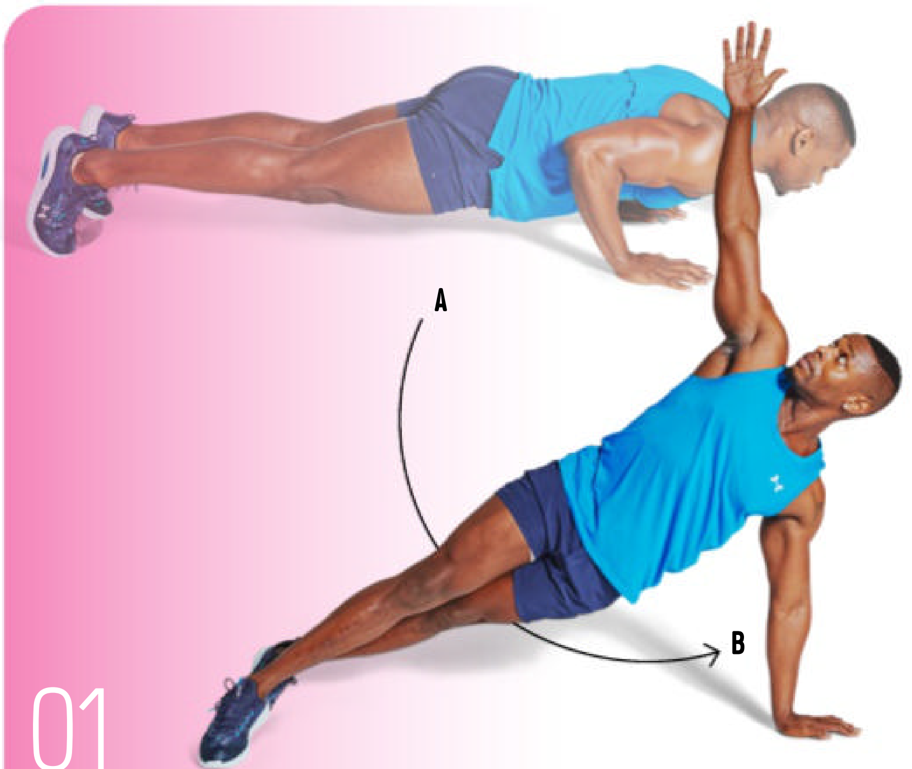


01

RENEGADE ROW

Start in a press-up position, with your hands on a set of dumbbells, your feet spread and your abs and glutes tight (**A**). Bend at your elbows and shoulders, then lower into a press-up and press back up, lifting the right dumbbell and rowing it to the right side of your ribcage (**B**). Return to your start position; repeat on your left side. That's 1 rep; do reps for 60 secs.

▶ C\ 01 BODY-WEIGHT WORKOUT

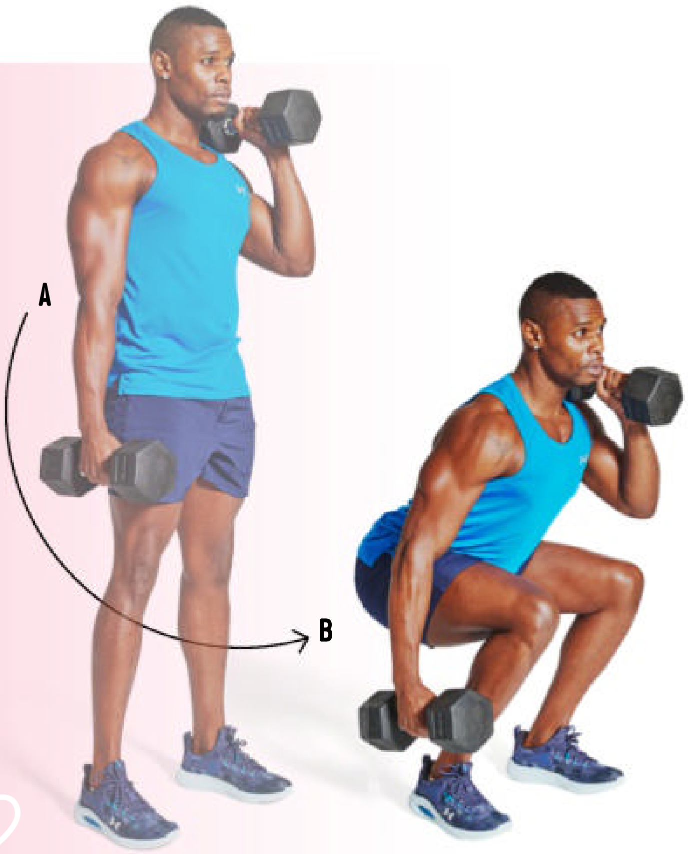


01

T PRESS-UP

In a press-up position, place your hands just wider than shoulder width, your abs and glutes tight. Bend your elbows and shoulders, lowering your chest to within an inch of the floor (**A**). Press back up, then lift your right hand off the floor, up towards the ceiling, while turning your chest to the right and squeezing your shoulder blades (**B**). That's 1 rep; do 3 on each side.

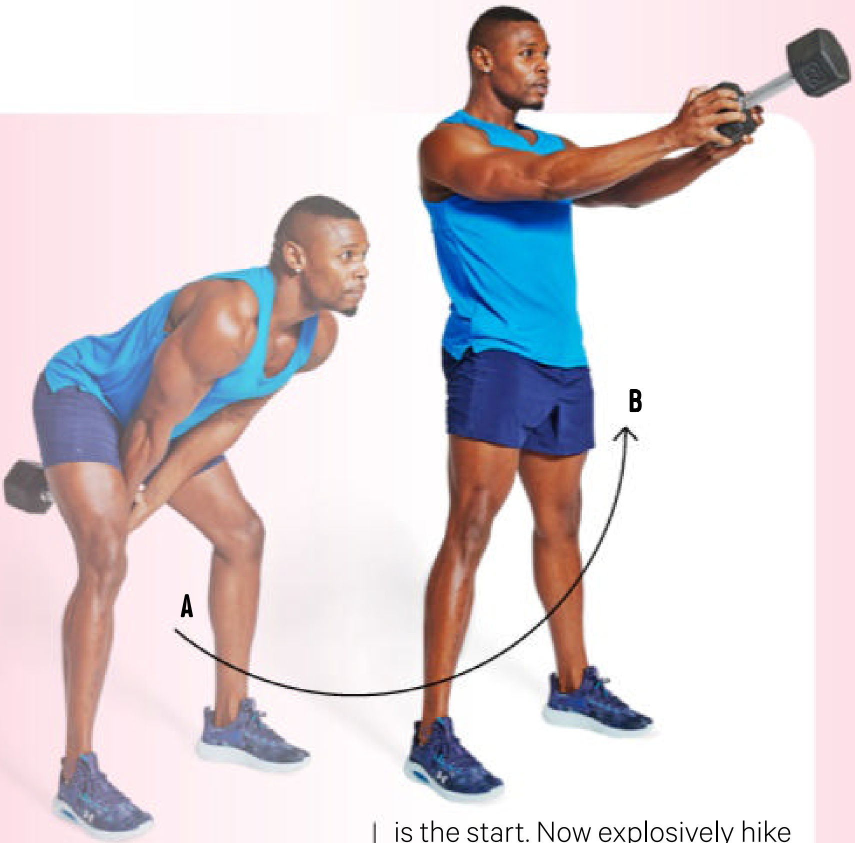
PHOTOGRAPHY: TYLER JOE. GROOMING: ELOISE CHEUNG. MOVE MODEL: TYRIEK TAYLOR IS A MANHATTAN-BASED PERSONAL TRAINER. CLOTHING: TANK AND SHOES, UNDER ARMOUR; SHORTS, TEN THOUSAND



02

MIXED-RACK SQUAT

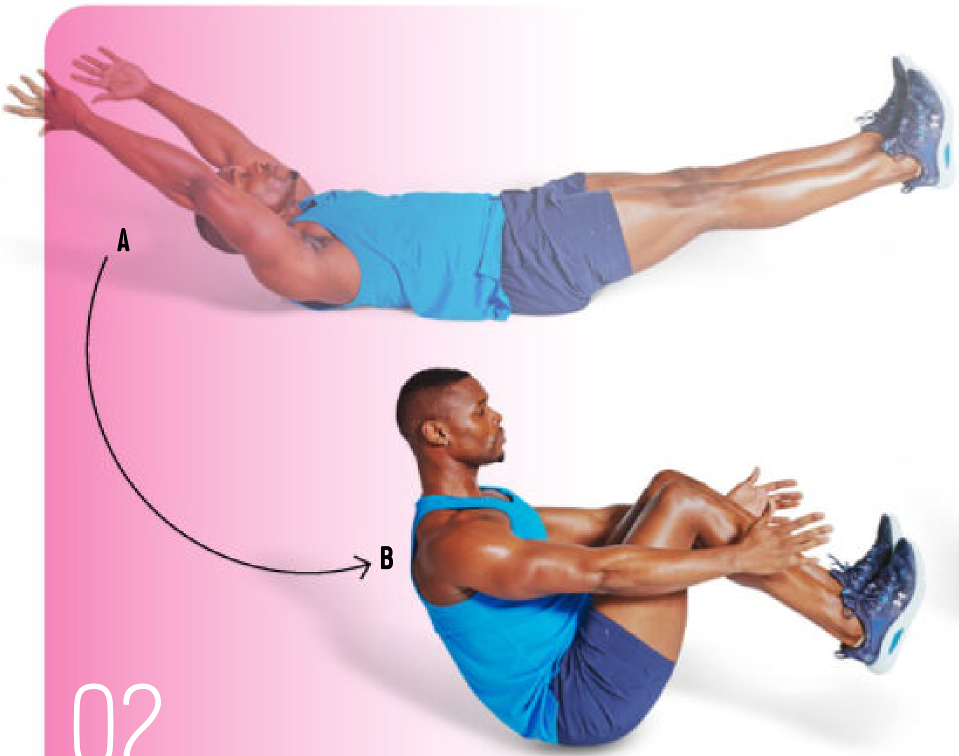
With one dumbbell in your left hand at your shoulder and the other in your right hand at your hip, stand with your abs and glutes tight, your feet about shoulder-width apart (**A**). Push your bum back, bend your knees and lower your torso until your thighs are parallel to the floor (**B**). Stand up. That's 1 rep; do reps for 20 secs on one side, then 20 secs on the other.



03

DUMBBELL SWING

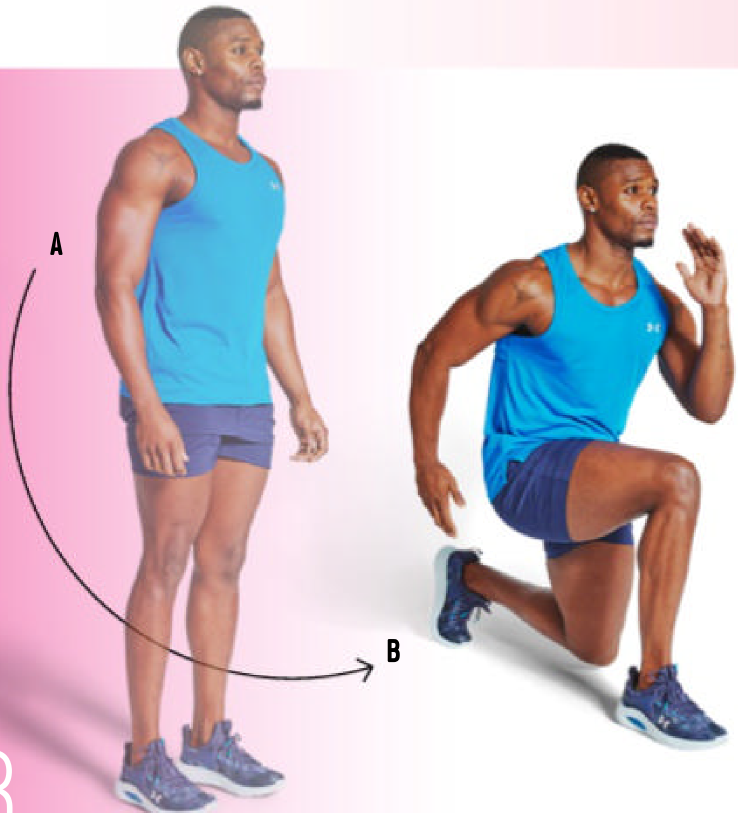
Stand about 2 feet behind a dumbbell, your feet shoulder-width apart. Push your bum back and grab one end of the weight with both hands. Tighten your abs. This is the start. Now explosively hike the dumbbell between your legs (**A**). Stand tall and squeeze your glutes; this will propel the weight forwards. Let its momentum take it back between your legs as you push your bum back, then explosively stand and squeeze your glutes, driving it forwards (**B**). Repeat this pattern for 20 secs.



02

MODIFIED V-UP

Lie on your back, with your arms and legs outstretched. Tighten your abs, pressing your lower back into the floor. Now lift your legs an inch from the floor. Lift your shoulder blades an inch from the floor. This is the start (**A**). Now squeeze your abs, pulling your knees in towards your chest (**B**). Return to your start position. That's 1 rep; do 25.



03

REVERSE LUNGE

Start standing, your abs and glutes tight (**A**). Step back with your left leg, then bend at your knees, lowering your torso until your right thigh (**B**) is parallel to the floor. Press through your right heel and return to the start. That's 1 rep; do 10 on each side.

04 HEALTHY *HUNGER-BEATING* BREAKFASTS

Few foods condense such an effective mix of body-boosting nutrients into as simple and affordable a package as the humble egg. But egg-white scrambles quickly grow tiresome. Make a stronger start to your day with these recipes

RECIPE 01

POACHED EGGS WITH AVOCADO AND CHORIZO JAM

BY MARCUS WAREING OF MARCUS AT THE BERKELEY

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

SERVES 2

- 1 ONION
- 2 GARLIC CLOVES
- 2 TBSP THYME
- ½ TSP ALLSPICE
- 1 TSP SMOKED PAPRIKA
- OLIVE OIL
- 50ML BALSAMIC VINEGAR
- 2 TBSP TOMATO PUREE
- 1 TBSP TREACLE
- 200G CHORIZO, DICED
- 4 EGGS
- 1 AVOCADO, DICED
- 1 LEMON

HOW TO MAKE IT

To make the jam, chop the onion and heat it in a pan with garlic, thyme, spices and a glug of olive oil. Now add a liberal splash of balsamic vinegar, followed by the puree, the treacle and the chorizo. Simmer for 30 mins.

Bring some salted water to the boil with a splash of vinegar. Whisk the water, crack an egg into a cup and pour it in. Simmer for 3½ mins, repeating the process with your other eggs.

Blend the hunger-curbing avocado with a squeeze of lemon to taste, plus salt and pepper, then spread it on a slice of toasted sourdough. Layer on your jam and top with the eggs.

RECIPE 02

BROAD BEANS AND FRESH VEG FRITTATA

BY ALDO ZILLI OF CASA ZILLI

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

SERVES 2

- 150G BROAD BEANS
- 1 ONION, CHOPPED
- 350G MIXED VEG (TRY SPINACH, PEPPERS AND ASPARAGUS)
- 6 LARGE EGGS
- 2 TBSP CHOPPED PARSLEY
- 50G PECORINO, GRATED

HOW TO MAKE IT

To cook the beans, blanch them in boiling water for 3 to 5 mins, drain, then remove the skins.

Saute the onion before adding the veg (use up what's in your fridge) and cook for 4 mins. Beat your eggs with parsley and pecorino.

Add your eggs to the pan with salt and pepper. After 10 mins, bake under the grill for 3 mins. Once cooled, slice your veggie frittata into wedges for a portable protein- and fibre-rich breakfast.

RECIPE 04

ONSEN EGG

BY SCOTT HALLSWORTH, FORMER NOBU HEAD CHEF

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

SERVES 1

- 1 EGG
- 200ML DASHI (SOUP STOCK)
- 3 TBSP DARK SOYA SAUCE
- 3 TBSP MIRIN
- 3 TBSP SAKE
- HANDFUL KOMBU STICKS, BROKEN
- 2 HANDFULS SPINACH
- BUTTER FOR FRYING
- 1 GARLIC CLOVE, SLICED
- 3 SPRING ONIONS, CHOPPED
- 1 TBSP GRATED FRESH GINGER

HOW TO MAKE IT

Japan's hot take on morning eggs? Slow cooking. This gives a creamy texture, with minimal added calories. Pop your egg, in its shell, in a pan of 63°C water for 1 hr. **Simmer** the dashi, soya sauce, mirin, sake and kombu on a low heat to prepare an antioxidant-rich mixture. **Saute** your spinach in a little butter along with the garlic. Once wilted, arrange the spinach. Take the shell off your egg and slide it carefully into your bowl; now pour in the sauce. Add some sliced spring onions and grated ginger for a kick of flavour.

→

RECIPE 03

FIERY SHAKSHUKA

BY JOEL BRAHAM OF THE GOOD EGG

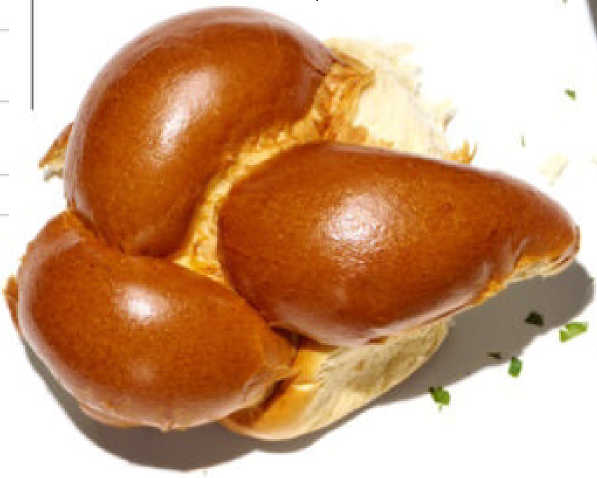
WHAT YOU'LL NEED

SERVES 4

- 4 MIXED PEPPERS
- 1 ONION, SLICED
- 2 GARLIC CLOVES, SLICED
- HANDFUL EACH OF PARSLEY AND CORIANDER
- 2 SPRIGS THYME
- 1 TSP SMOKED PAPRIKA
- ½ TSP CAYENNE PEPPER
- CINNAMON STICK
- 1 TBSP BROWN SUGAR
- 1 TSP TOMATO PUREE
- 2 TINS CHOPPED TOMATOES
- 8 EGGS

HOW TO MAKE IT

Halve and deseed the peppers, then roast for 15 to 20 mins at 180°C. Meanwhile, heat the onions, garlic, herbs, spices, sugar, puree and tomatoes in an ovenproof pan. **Add the** peppers to the sauce and simmer for 25 mins, then crack your eggs into small wells in the mixture and cook until poached. **Traditionally,** this dish is served with challah bread and a dollop of preserved lemon yoghurt. Plain yoghurt with a squeeze of lemon and sourdough will work in a pinch.



PHOTOGRAPHY: SUN LEE. FOOD STYLIST: LUCY-RUTH HATHAWAY. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: STUDIO 33

04

GUT-SMART PHONE APPS

For support at the tap of a touchscreen, try these downloads designed to abet your best efforts

MACROFACTOR

An intuitive approach to eating might work for some, but for most people, meal-tracking offers useful intel. This app customises eating plans and doesn't shame users for veering off course.

macrofactorapp.com

MAPMYRUN

Upping your mileage for 2023? This app offers GPS tracking and real-time audio coaching, with cues for metrics such as pace, cadence and distance. You can also save favourite routes – and locate new ones.

mapmyrun.com

INSIGHT TIMER

This free app has a head-spinning 100,000 guided meditations centred on common issues such as sleep and stress – helpful considering your ability to manage both bears on your health and weight-loss efforts.

insighttimer.com

SWEATCOIN

Want to walk more but struggle to incentivise yourself? This app rewards your every step with cryptocurrency 'Sweatcoins', which provide discounts on purchases from fitness brands or you can choose to convert them into charity donations.

sweatco.in

04 MYTHS WORTH *FORGETTING*

Don't be swayed by bad science. Here are four outdated fitness maxims that won't help you shift the weight

01

CARBOHYDRATES MAKE YOU FAT

In moderation, carbs are an ally, not an enemy. *MH* nutrition adviser Lee Amico suggests aiming to get 30% of your calories from carbs. To get the best out of your workouts, shoot for 30g to 60g before and after training.

02

REST DAYS MEAN SOFA TIME

You can't go at 100% all the time. But gently training the same muscles you targeted yesterday – cycling after squats, say – can counteract pain, boost circulation and improve nutrient delivery to muscles, while helping you burn extra calories.

03

CARDIO TRUMPS WEIGHTLIFTING

Your muscles contribute to a hefty 20% of your metabolic rate, the *International Journal Of Obesity* found, while your fat mass uses up just 3% of your energy. To maximise benefits, blend strength training with conditioning.

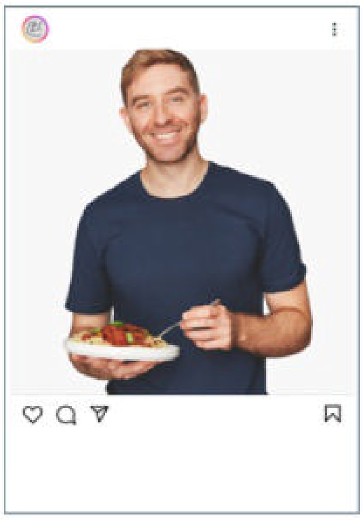
04

CHEAT DAYS BOOST METABOLISM

Taking a break from a strict meal plan can reduce 'diet fatigue', and there's some evidence that varying your carb and calorie intake has metabolic benefits. But a binge-and-bust eating pattern won't do your goals any good. That's junk science.

09 *INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS* TO FOLLOW

Benefit from the right kind of influence in your journey to better health with tips from those in the know



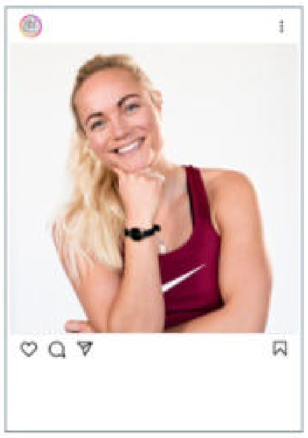
FOR NO-NONSENSE NUTRITION

GRAEME TOMLINSON @THEFITNESSCHEF_

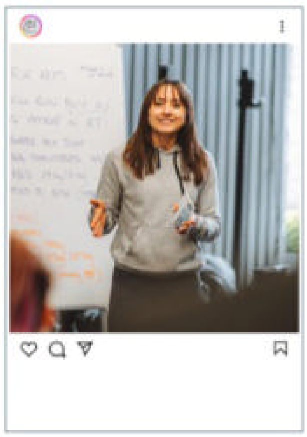
The coach and author's humorous reels and food comparisons have proved popular with an audience hungry for straight answers. If you're done with complicated diets, he's your go-to man.

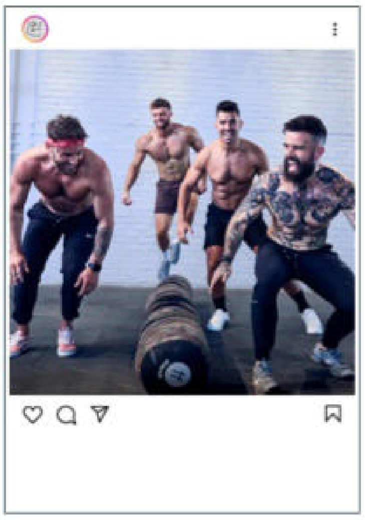
See also

@esgfitness



@sinead.feedfuelperform





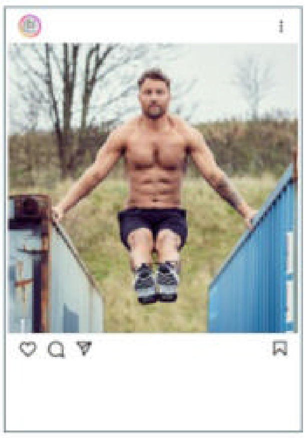
FOR WORKOUTS YOU'LL ENJOY

MEN'S HEALTH SQUAD @MENSHEALTHSQUAD

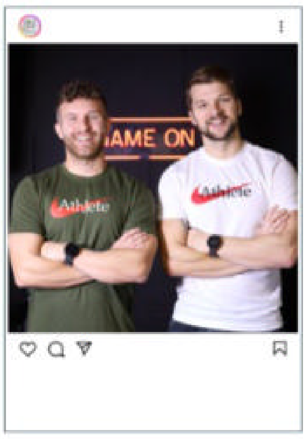
An uninspiring fitness plan will prove difficult to stick to. For daily workouts, quick tips and live Q&As featuring some of the UK's best coaches, sign up to the Men's Health Squad. (Forgive us the plug.)

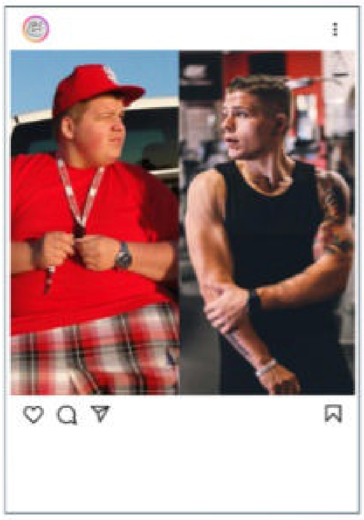
See also

@theandrew.tracey



@theleanmachinesofficial





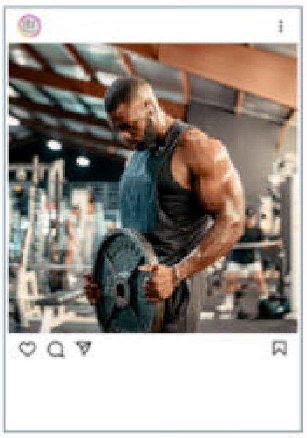
FOR EVERYDAY INSPIRATION

JOHN DAVID GLAUDE @OBESE_TO_BEAST

Staying trim is a lot easier if you've always been that way. Glaude's weight-loss transformation may be dramatic, but his approach to functional fitness and balanced eating is refreshingly low-key.

See also

@marquesemingo



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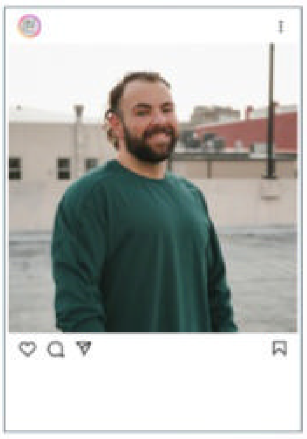


PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID VENNI; MICHAEL HEDGE

01 NEAT TRICK THAT *MIGHT* WORK

From Dwayne Johnson to Mark Wahlberg, many Hollywood actors swear by a pre-dawn wake-up call. And there might be something in it…

'I'm up at 4am every day to work extremely hard *before* I go into work,' once said our cover star Dwayne Johnson, 'not because I'm batshit crazy… but because I know my competitors are not paying that price.'

For most of us, voluntarily hitting the gym at 4am does feel a little batshit. But a smaller shift in your sleep schedule might be wise if weight loss is your goal. A study by Finnish scientists, published in the journal *Obesity,* found that 'morning people' tend to select healthier foods throughout the day, while late starters are predisposed to eating more sugar and less protein. Turning in before 10pm, then, could be an easy win for eating well.

As a bonus, separate research by the University of Colorado Boulder, MIT and Harvard also noted a link between earlier sleep patterns and a lower risk of depressive symptoms.

A few tips? Try exercising before work, exposing yourself to as much natural light as possible in those first few hours and eating your last meal of the day earlier than usual. You'll soon find your happy hour.

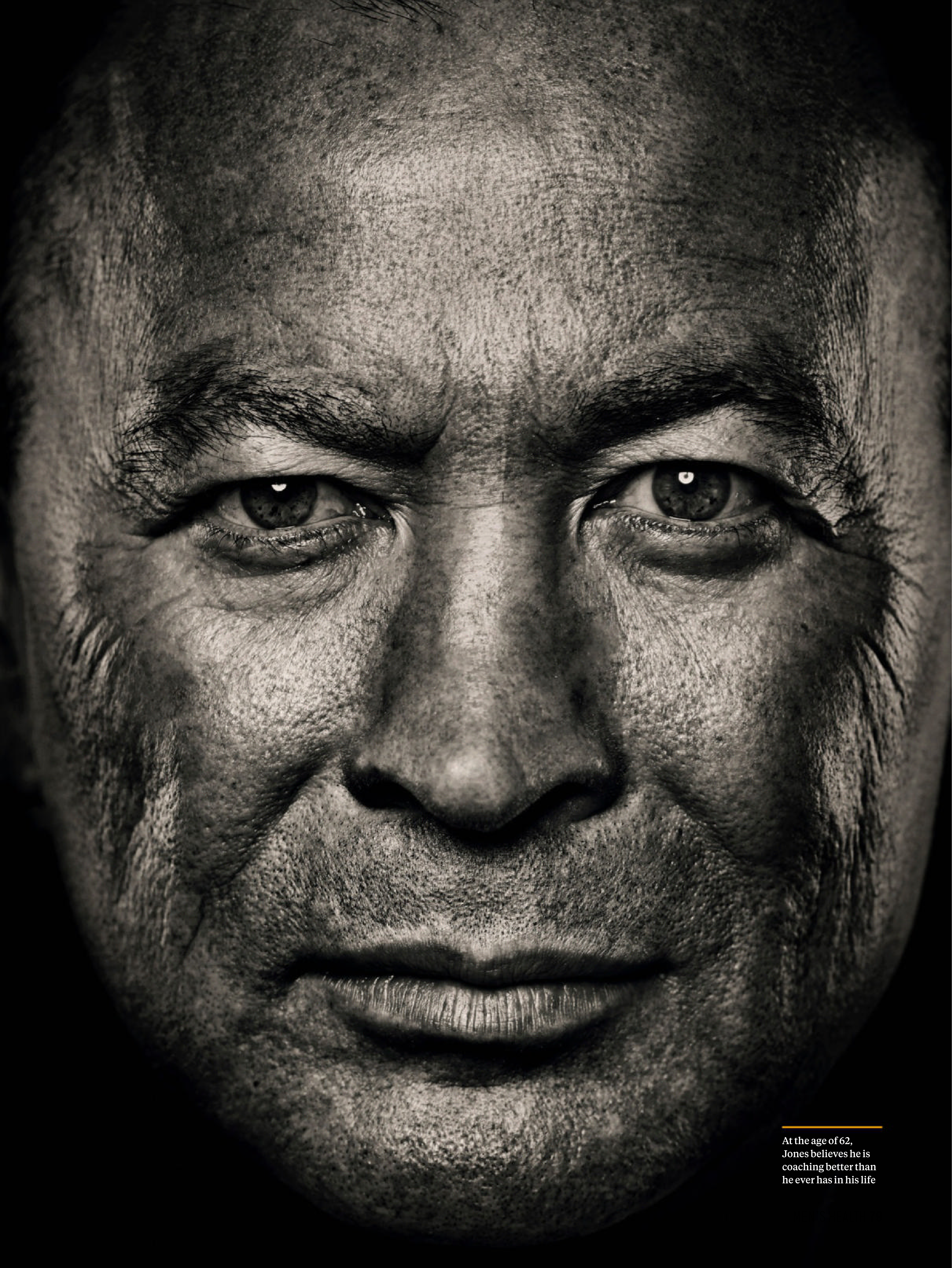
Alastair Campbell
Journalist, mental
health campaigner
and *Men's Health*
contributing editor

Talking Heads
Alastair Campbell meets **Eddie Jones**

Aussie Rules

If there's a manager in professional sport who can be relied upon to speak his mind, it's Eddie Jones. But the occasionally brusque manner belies a keen emotional intelligence. Amid media speculation that his position is under threat, **he spoke exclusively to *Men's Health* about mental strength and the pursuit of perfection**

Photography by Robert Wilson



At the age of 62, Jones believes he is coaching better than he ever has in his life

Talking Heads
Alastair Campbell meets **Eddie Jones**

Eddie Jones has less than a year to go before his eight-year tenure as head coach of England's rugby team comes to an end. Though, if you believe the current frenzy, the relationship may finish rather sooner than that.

If he stays the distance, it will certainly be an eventful 12 months: the Six Nations kicks off in February, followed by the World Cup next September. Jones has a few World Cup demons to slay, having twice taken teams to finals – his Australia losing to England in 2003, courtesy of Clive Woodward's coaching and Jonny Wilkinson's boot, then his England losing to South Africa in 2019. During our long chat at England's Pennyhill Park base last month, he admits it took him several years to get over that first defeat. Now 62, he says age and experience helped him deal better with the second one.

In between, the Tasmanian-born son of a mixed Australian-Japanese marriage, who himself married a Japanese woman, Hiroko, coached Japan and helped revolutionise the game there. Once he has left England – he is adamant he will, whatever happens – he is on the lookout for another 'meaningful, transformative' role. There is also a big sparkle in his eyes when I suggest he should try his hand at coaching in the sport he played as a child, rugby league. I would love to see that, what with rugby league – personal opinion alert – being the superior code!

His parents' mixed marriage is an important theme in his life, and in this interview. It means he has never felt fully at home or fully accepted – perhaps useful for a working-class Aussie navigating the upper-middle class workings of a very English Rugby Football Union [RFU]. It also means that he has developed a thick skin and it's refreshing to talk to a high-profile figure who seems genuinely not to care what is said or written about him. In fact, he often only learns about the worst things from his 97-year-old mother in Sydney – one of a tiny handful of people on the planet whose views matter to him.

AC: So, whether playing or coaching, what is the balance between the physical and the mental?

EJ: I have never separated the two. I grew up in Australia, lived a healthy lifestyle, always exercising, and I have kept that going. There is a reasonable pressure in this job, so I take breaks at the end of tournaments to recover, which always involves hard physical training. Before Covid, my wife and I would go to this CrossFit camp in Okinawa, a beautiful tropical island. I'd train twice a day, relax, have a nice time, then come back stronger.

AC: Is your mental health good?

EJ: I think so. I don't sleep a lot, but I don't have sleep problems.

AC: How much sleep a night?

EJ: Maybe five hours. I take a half-hour nap in the day, if I can. I don't feel that I have stressful periods. I can get bored. That is the only time I get stressed.

AC: You never feel a stress that is almost physical?

EJ: No. I was lucky in that my parents brought me up to be quite balanced in how I saw things. They had an unusual marriage, [Australian father, Japanese-American mother] and my mother was very forgiving, even though people could be very rude to her.

AC: She faced a lot of racism?

EJ: Yes, but she never carried the hurt. I'm similar. If someone is having a go, or there is stuff raging in the media, it never worries me.

AC: Is there a danger that makes you less understanding of how other people get affected by things that you say?

EJ: I've never thought of that. I have become more cognisant of other people's worries. When I was younger, I was less tolerant. I just wanted people to be like me. Now I think about their feelings.

AC: What do you mean by 'be like me'?

EJ: 'Get it done. Don't worry. Get on with it. No excuses.' The players I coach now, there is a lot more going on in their lives. Their whole life is rugby, so if something happens in rugby it can affect everything. When I was growing up, sport was a *part* of your life, not *all* of your life. I can ask guys today, 'When did you decide to be a professional rugby player?' And they might say as early as 12. Well, if you get disappointment or injury, your whole life is affected. It's one of the reasons mental health is such an issue for sportspeople now.

AC: In your playing days, would a coach

01. A fresh-faced Eddie Jones in his early playing days

02. Jones in the thick of the action digging the ball out of a ruck

03. His rugby career began in 1981, playing hooker for Randwick in Sydney, Australia

04. Jones (#2) played against the British & Irish Lions in 1989

05. He coached Japan to the Rugby World Cup in 2015

ever have thought about or considered the mental health of a player?

EJ: No. If you weren't up for it, you were 'soft, don't need him'. Now, we are more aware of the anxiety players can suffer due to poor performance or criticism and media pressure, and we try to support them.

AC: I get the sense you really don't care much what the media says about you. It doesn't get to you.

EJ: That's right, mate.

AC: Would players be stronger and better if they had that attitude? Do you try to help them get it?

EJ: They would definitely be better. The most influential person in your life is you, and that's the only person you should be listening to.

AC: But hold on, you're the coach! You want the players to listen to you.

EJ: I want them to coach themselves. I am a guide. The best players have always been their own best coaches. You might have someone who carries your bags, or helps you in a particular area, but the players all drive their own careers.

AC: So what is your job?

EJ: I am a facilitator. We play a very difficult game: 15 players on the field together, all interdependent. We have to facilitate an environment in which they understand that being their own best is not always the best for the team. They may need to modify to help the team as a whole. That is why rugby is such an intriguing game. In cricket, if you're Ben Stokes or James Anderson, you run in and you bowl fast. In rugby, you're always cognisant of the interdependence of the whole team.

AC: Do you think the fans get that?

EJ: No, they don't. That's the hardest thing, understanding it is such a team game, all the time.

AC: When you get a lot of flak, is there ever a point where you think you should stop and listen, or do you always push it to one side?

EJ: I push it to one side. You have to be in the game to understand this because coaching changes so much. I was talking to a kid in the bar earlier, a Chelsea supporter. He was saying the manager was under pressure. Just 12 months ago, he was the best thing that ever happened to Chelsea. I was with a cricket coach yesterday. He won the IPL. But then he started coaching in The Hundred and didn't win a game. So he's thinking, 'Am I the best or the worst?' There are extremes, and you have to keep a moderated view. Life is a continuum with best to worst at the extremes, and you've just got to keep bubbling on.

AC: And not take it personally.

EJ: Correct.

AC: So if Clive Woodward has a pop at you...

EJ: I feel sad for him. If that is the best thing he has to do in his life, then he hasn't a lot to do.

AC: Would you ever do that, take a pop at your successors?

EJ: No, I'm going to make sure that I don't. There's

01

02

01. It took Jones nearly four years to get over losing to England in the 2003 World Cup final

02. In 2019, Jones was a beaten finallist once again. Although age and experience allowed him to be ‘more balanced’

another way. You don't need to do it. Rod Macqueen, Steve Hansen, great coaches. They just get on with the rest of their lives. When you've had your turn, you give it to someone else.

AC: Are you definitely going to go?

EJ: Yes. I only came for four years. Then we lost the World Cup final in 2019 – I felt I could still contribute, so did the RFU, so we agreed another four years. I knew it would be difficult because we would have to change the team. I've enjoyed it, it's a great position, but eight years with the same country, that's enough.

AC: You're a working-class guy. Why rugby union and not rugby league?

EJ: It would've been rugby league – I grew up playing league, I loved it. But then I went to high school and turned to union. It was a little school. The Ella brothers [Mark, Glen and Gary] went there and they revolutionised rugby. There was one day we played St Joseph's, the big private school in Sydney, and we beat them. Just a normal school. It produced a revolution. There have been three Australia coaches from that one school, all working class, so that's quite an effect. We changed rugby.

AC: Have you never fancied coaching in rugby league?

EJ: I would, but no one has offered me a job [laughs].

AC: Why not?

EJ: It's a different sport, lots of nuances. You would need to spend a lot of time on it. I've been asked to talk about jobs before, but it's never been the right time.

AC: You could do it.

EJ: I reckon I could.

AC: You've got to do it. What do you like about rugby league?

EJ: The simplicity of it. The intensity, the speed, the skill, the courage.

AC: Is there the same league-union class division in Australia as in England?

EJ: It's not exactly the same but it's there. There are certain countries where it's more mixed I think – South Africa, New Zealand, France – whereas the Anglo-Saxon countries tend to have the class thing.

AC: With the RFU, do you not feel a bit fish-out-of-water?

EJ: Not really. I enjoy it.

AC: Do you enjoy being seen as different?

EJ: I don't seek out to be different.

AC: But you can't always just be in your own little world where you don't care about what people think.

EJ: I've maybe never really felt at home anywhere.

AC: Because of being mixed race?

EJ: Yeah, mixed race. Growing up in Australia, half-Japanese, but then that's not the same as being Japanese. When I went to work in Japan, my wife – who is 100% Japanese – gave me the best advice. She said, 'Don't ever think they will treat you as Japanese.' And they don't. So coming to do the job for England, one of the reasons I wanted to do it was because it would be so different. And I've enjoyed it.

AC: So you've done the job for three countries. What have been the differences and the different challenges?

EJ: Generally speaking, Australians are brasher. The English are more passive but strong-willed. If you get in the right stream on that strong will, you get a great result. The Japanese basically want to be led but that is changing. Nowadays, the players there want more of a say, too.

AC: Are there any challenges unique to England?

EJ: Probably the hardest thing here is that we get so little time with the players. The players are owned by the clubs, and there's this complex relationship between the clubs and the RFU, with the players somewhere in between. Trying to understand those relationships is difficult.

AC: Have you decided what you'll do next? Is this your last big job in Union?

EJ: I'm 62 now and I think in pure coaching terms I am coaching better than I ever have. Results aren't always perfect, but I'm happy with how I have been coaching. After this, I want to do something really meaningful. I've enjoyed England a lot, it was a bit of a rescue job at the start, now rebuilding, and I am confident I will leave things in good shape. Japan was a free hit, a country that had never known winning and we changed that. So next, maybe take a smaller country, or a country where the game needs to be repaired.

> 'We're aware of the anxiety players suffer and we try to support them'

AC: Would you fancy Scotland?

EJ: I wouldn't coach against England in the domestic tournaments.

AC: Once you've left this job, if Australia play England, who would you want to win?

EJ: Don't care really. On international allegiance, I am Australian and I want Australia to do well, but I also want Japan to do well, and in the end you love the players, so it depends on the players I know. If guys like Maro [Itoje] and Owen [Farrell] are playing, I'd support them.

AC: So why this 'hard man' reputation?

EJ: I've been hard at times, no doubt.

AC: Your definition of 'hard' being...

EJ: Probably being relentless in the pursuit of improvement and not doing it in the best way. What was seen as hard 20 years ago is not acceptable now. You can't talk to the players in the same way.

AC: Is that good or bad?

EJ: It's just the way it is. You can still guide a player, give the same message, but perhaps not in the same way.

AC: But are there not players who would benefit from you pinning them up against a wall and saying, 'For fuck's sake, sort yourself out?'

EJ: There are some players you could talk to like that. But fewer. And you couldn't pin them against the wall [smiles].

AC: You got into a bit of bother for seeming to criticise the hold of private schools on the game, saying it made for overly cosseted players. Why were you rebuked for telling the truth?

EJ: I don't know what was written because I never read it. But the whole thing has been: how can we get better diversity? If that was taken out of context, I don't know and I don't care. But I'm really proud of what we have done here, and of players such as Ellis Genge and Kyle Sinckler, who have come from non-traditional rugby backgrounds and just been terrific.

AC: But you do feel that if you could broaden the talent pool, England would be more competitive?

EJ: One hundred per cent. It's a challenge. Australia has the same thing. When I coached the Queensland Reds, the whole side came from eight private schools. Now you have kids who come from country areas breaking through. It's becoming more common. That will happen here, too.

AC: How do you see England's prospects ahead of the 2023 World Cup?

EJ: If this was the Cheltenham Gold Cup, there's a pack of four out front – France, Ireland, South Africa, New Zealand – and we are fifth, right behind them, right on the rails. A good position, provided we keep improving. Australia are there or thereabouts with us. It's going to be the closest World Cup ever. France and Ireland are the in-form teams right now, but things will change.

AC: How big a disappointment was the last

PHOTOGRAPHY: CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; COLORSPORT/ANDREW COWIE

one, losing the final in 2019?

EJ: It was bad.

AC: How long does it take you to get over something like that?

EJ: I was able to be more balanced that time. We did okay, but we were just not quite good enough. I was terrible after losing the final in 2003. It took me three or four years to get back to where I was. I was so desperate to win that. I didn't coach well.

AC: What does that mean when you say you didn't coach well?

EJ: It was more about my desire to win something than developing the team. It was broadly the same team that had won the previous World Cup, and it had only ever been done once before, winning two in a row. So by getting to the final, you've done well – there are 18 other teams who didn't get there. But then you lose and you're seen as a failure, and then you have to rebuild the team. Players lose motivation, some players get swayed by money, others get old.

AC: But three or four years? That is a long time! Do you get down, get depressed at times like that?

EJ: I just get frustrated.

AC: Do you relive it, relive what went wrong?

EJ: No, it's just frustration. And then you start to think maybe you're not the problem, the players are. But that's not the way to think. You always have to be thinking, 'How can I light them up?' If I'm not lighting them up, I'm doing something wrong.

AC: So if anyone mentions that Jonny Wilkinson drop goal that won England the final in 2003, is that like a dagger through the heart, even now?

EJ: Well, people do mention it a lot [smiles]. And as you say that, I can certainly see it flicker through my head. I mean, that tournament was a great time to be an Aussie. I'm coaching the national side on home soil in a World Cup. The Prime Minister, John Howard, was hosting a reception for us and one of the players said to me, 'I wish this could go on forever.' So then losing, that really, really hurt. In 2019, I got over it much quicker. I was older, more experienced. When you're young, you don't always learn the lessons you should.

AC: 'I love winning' or 'I hate losing' – which of those two statements most applies to you?

EJ: I love winning.

AC: I think that puts you in a minority of the coaches and athletes I've asked. What do you most love about winning?

EJ: Getting 15 guys to play together with a superiority, everyone understanding each other, everything in unity and motion… when it clicks, it's like a symphony.

AC: Still, I bet if you had won that World Cup in 2003, or 2019, the buzz wouldn't have stayed with you for three or four years, would it? So, defeat hurts more than victory gives joy, no?

EJ: You know the story of the Seattle Seahawks, when they win the Super Bowl and they're all there with their hands on the trophy? The coach, Pete Carroll, he says, 'We have done what we set out to do.' And then there's a pause, and they all think he is going to say, 'We won the trophy.' But he says, 'We found our best.' Playing at the highest level, you are always trying to find your best.

AC: Have you ever had a game where all 15 were at their best?

EJ: Been close to it, mate. The 2019 semi-final against New Zealand was almost a perfect game. We were so good that day. Japan against South Africa. There have been times it was close. But there has never been the perfect game.

> 'What is my best quality as a coach? I always strive to be better'

AC: When we're watching in the stands, fans always think they know what's going on. But what's the gap between what you see and know, and what the fan sees and knows?

EJ: Big.

AC: It's like Sean Dyche always says to me, 'You think you know about football, but the truth is you know the same as I do about politics: next to fuck all.'

EJ: [Laughs] I can imagine him saying that.

AC: So what is the gap between you and the guy in the Barbour jacket?

EJ: The big gap is the back stories, what happens during the week, the relationships between the players, what happens in their private lives. There might be something going on at home, something bad might have happened at training. We have to know the players so well that we are getting them to be their best and making them feel they can trust the environment in which we want them to give their best.

AC: But from their perspective, is there not a risk that if they are open they might put stuff in your head that makes you doubt them? How do you get to honesty and trust?

EJ: Before the 2016 Australian tour, I made a speech to the team, setting out what it would take, how hard; I said it would be a Herculean effort. And Joe Marler came to me at the end and he said, 'I can't give you that, I can't go.' He had some issues and he is a very honest guy. But it takes a mature person to do that, to say he can't give his best. Other players, you see it in their eyes.

AC: What are your three top sports outside rugby union?

EJ: Cricket, rugby league and horse racing.

AC: Not football?

EJ: I do love it but it's not my natural sport. I don't know enough. I enjoy the drama it brings.

AC: Can you get anything out of watching the top football coaches?

EJ: The superficial stuff, maybe. I look at Pep Guardiola and Jürgen Klopp and they strike me as being good at managing young players. They are always very positive; even if the message is tough, they do it in a positive way. So I can get things from the pre-match and the post-match stuff, but not how they do the job. You would need to spend a lot of time to go deeper.

AC: Which do you prefer between coaching club and country?

EJ: No comparison, mate. Internationals. You're coaching the best players, they're playing in front of huge crowds, the buzz you get is great and it means so much to people. After the successful tour in Australia, everyone is coming up to you, wants to pat you on the back. Have a bad game and they're looking the other way, like you've been done for murder [laughs]. But you can change a lot through sport. In Japan, we changed the way the game was played and the way it was seen, and that changed the country. Look at the England women's football team and what they have done, the girls they will have inspired to say to their mum or their dad, 'I want to get into football.'

AC: Are you good with players in defeat? How do you deal with the ones who fucked up?

EJ: I'm pretty good. You have to create optimism straight away. Identify problems, find solutions. With players who haven't done well, you need to get on the front foot, make them realise they're not suddenly bad players, get the others to support

Jones sees his role primarily as a guide – someone who facilitates his players to perform at their collective best

them. Because on another day they might go and win it for us.

AC: What have been the biggest changes since your days as a player?

EJ: The greatest change is that the players talk less about the game because their lives are so much fuller. We're trying to construct an environment where they talk more. A lot of players today are more students of their own careers than the game.

AC: So paradoxically, professionalism has made them less obsessed with the actual game than you were in the amateur era?

EJ: Yes. I want them back to being the six-year-old kicking the ball in the park and loving it. The variation between loving it and not loving it is large.

AC: If you love it, are you a better player?

EJ: Yes, that follows.

AC: Has money changed the players?

EJ: Not a great deal.

AC: Social media?

EJ: You've got to realise how influential it can be for the players. You don't realise how much abuse they get if they've had a bad game, and unless they are sharing people, you won't know what it is doing to them. So if you see them kicking stones on Monday morning, you talk to them about it.

AC: Would you ask them why they were worrying about what some twat who never played the game is saying?

EJ: I remember watching a documentary on Australian swimming. There was a young guy, he said, '500 people might write how good I was; one says I am bad and I spend all night thinking about that one.' That's why I don't read it. It gets in your head and it's hard to get it out of there.

AC: Could you persuade that swimmer to change that mindset?

EJ: Hard, if that's the way it is.

AC: So you're lucky to have thick skin.

EJ: Age helps. When I was younger, I definitely read the papers and could be affected by it. My mother is 97 and she reads everything. She lives in Sydney and I try to call her every morning. She'll say, 'Is this true what they're saying? I told you not to swear!' [Laughs] I'm very lucky with my wife. She doesn't read anything about me.

AC: So you've got yourself, your mum, your wife – is there anyone else whose opinion matters to you?

EJ: I've got a guy called Neil Craig, an Aussie rules coach, coached for a long time, a bit older than me. He is our high-performance director, but basically a second set of eyes for me.

AC: A mentor?

EJ: Yes. Every morning we have a coffee and just go over what we need.

AC: You must have dropped hundreds, maybe thousands of players in your career. How easy do you find that to do?

EJ: It's always the worst part of the week. You've been telling guys you love them and then you tell them you don't. I've learned that it's all about the tone. The truth is as soon as you tell them they're dropped, they're not listening – all they remember is how you did it. They are always going to be hurt, but as long as you show you care and show hope, usually they are fine.

AC: What about if you are moving them out for good?

EJ: That's even harder. We dropped the Vunipola brothers, but we keep contact. There's always a chance you might need them, you keep the bridge open.

AC: What are your best qualities?

EJ: I always strive to be better. And I see the game pretty well.

AC: Did being a teacher help you become a better coach?

EJ: It is the foundation of all coaching. Coaching *is* teaching.

The Men'sHealth Tech Awards 2023

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02

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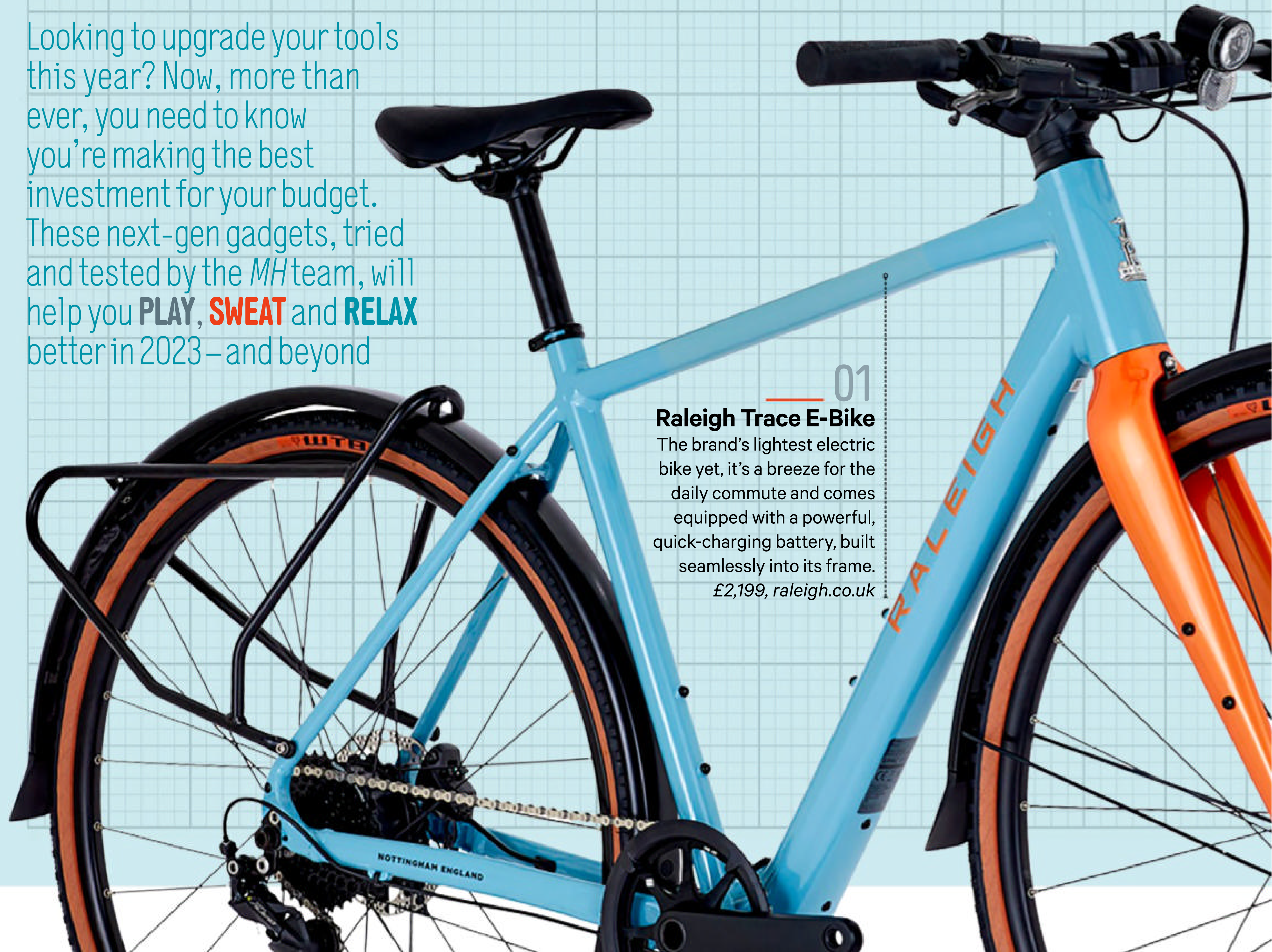
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01

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03

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£1,229, store.dji.com

04

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£499, currys.co.uk

05

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£599, store.google.com

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06

Yvolution Yes Electric Scooter

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£599, yvolution.com

07

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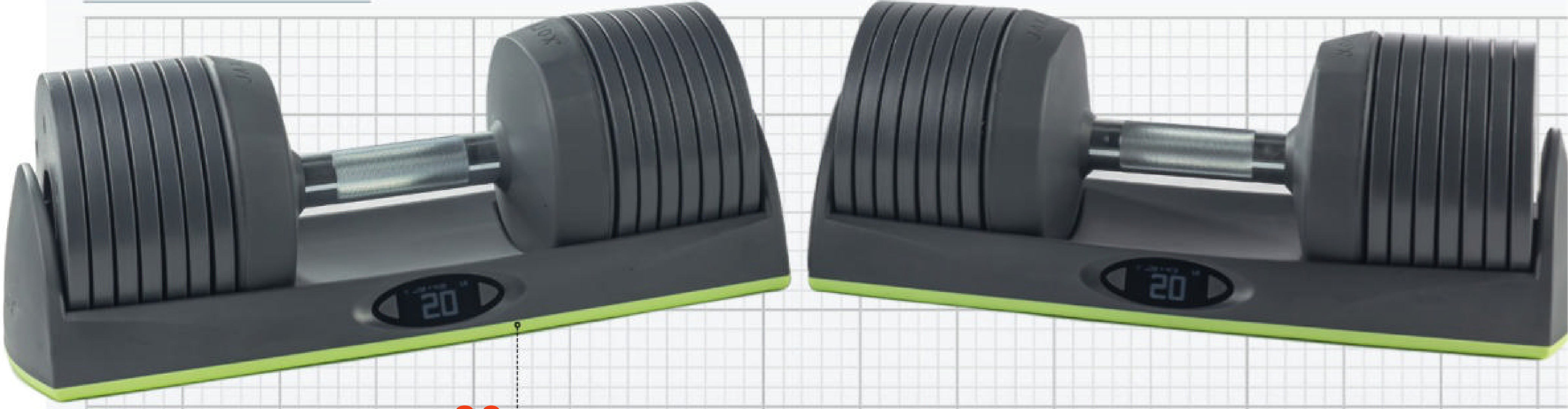
£799, trekitt.co.uk



08

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10

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£240, norseprojects.com

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Sweat

14
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LG Tone Free Fit

LG's fitness-focused earbuds are a real banger. The Tone Free Fit UTF8 has a crystal-clear sound with an impressive bass for those get-it-done workout playlists. The charging case uses UV-C light to zap sweat-induced bacteria, and the SwivelGrip technology helps them stay in place through any workout.

£179.98, lg.com

12
Apple Watch Ultra

A maxed-out watch for anyone who likes to have all the bells and whistles. Its beefed-up features include a titanium case and a dual-frequency GPS (so you'll never get lost).

£849, apple.com

16
Tribit Stormbox Blast Portable Speaker

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£199.99, amazon.co.uk

13
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£299, pxg.com

Buyer's Guide

17

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£999, irobot.co.uk

20

Colonna The Morning Machine

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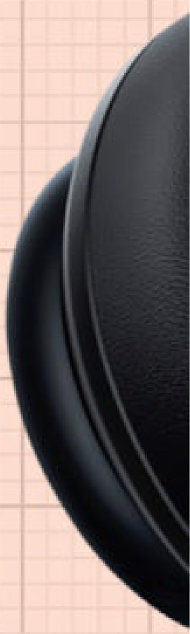
£345, colonnacoffee.com

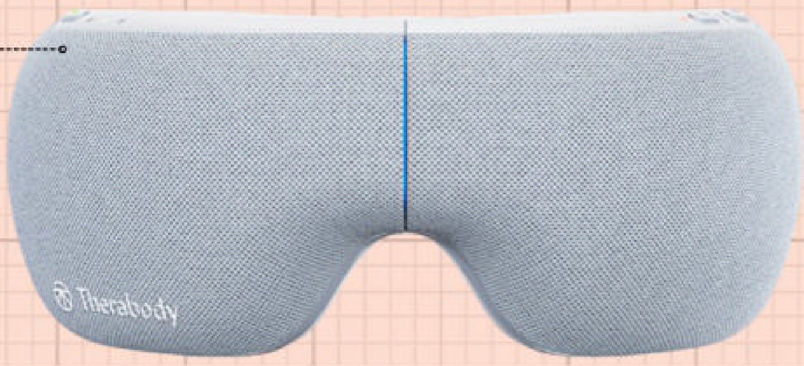


18

Therabody Smart Goggles

These massage goggles use vibration and heat to gently knead your eye area, and they have a sensor that responds to your heart rate. Put them on during the afternoon as a midday stress reliever, or wear them last thing at night to help you drift off to sleep.

£174, therabody.com



21

Traeger Timberline 850 Wifi Connected BBQ

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£1,999, johnlewis.com

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£112.99, philips.co.uk

22

Hyperice Venom Go

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£214, hyperice.com

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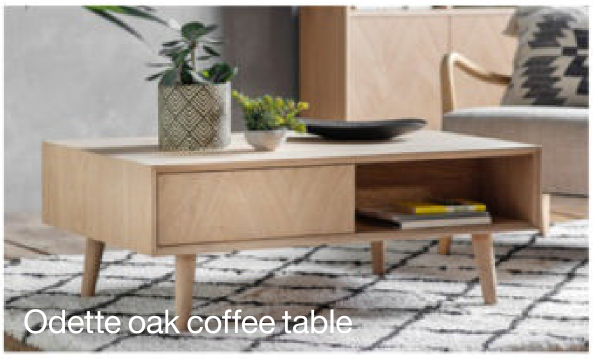
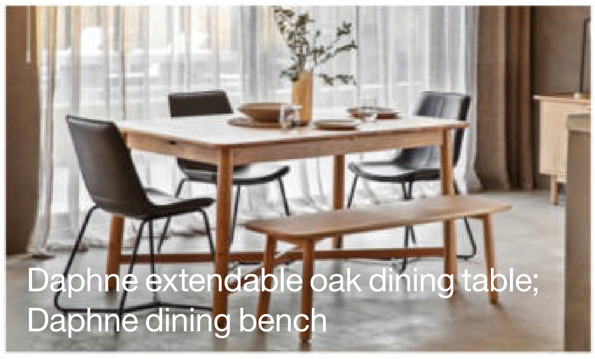


Odette oak coffee table



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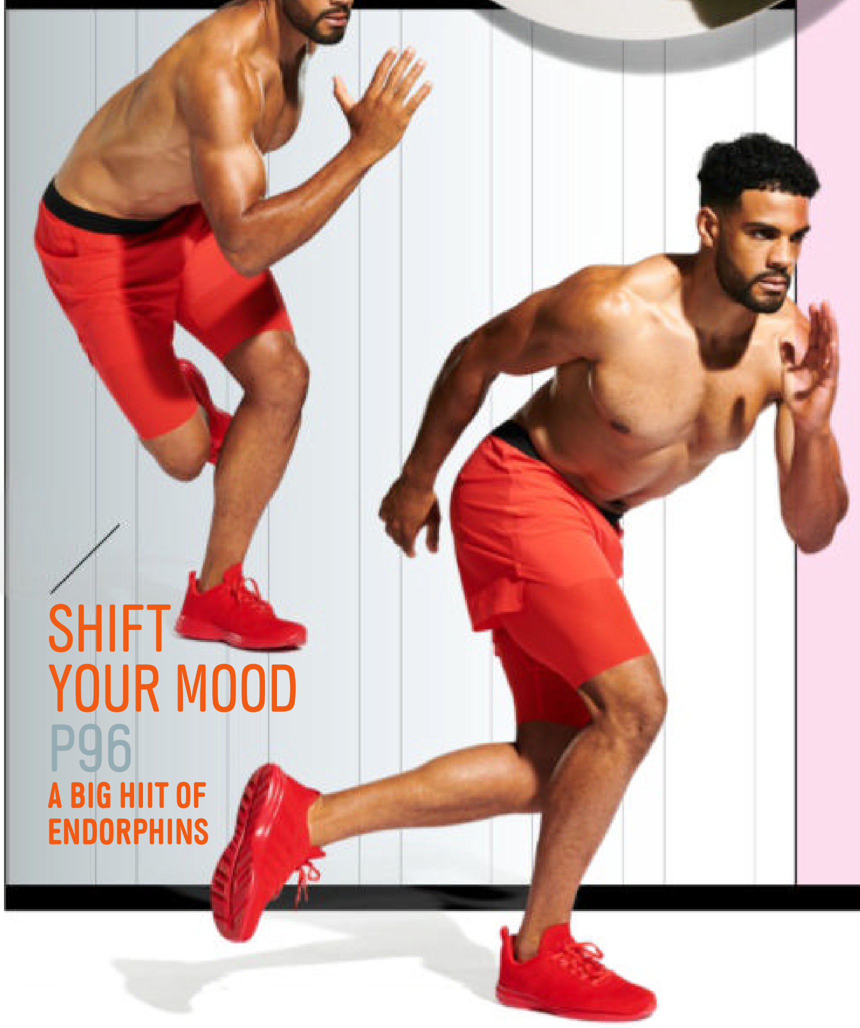
P104

THE SURFING GREAT ON MAKING WAVES AT 58



SHIFT YOUR MOOD

P96

A BIG HIIT OF ENDORPHINS

SUPP CHECK

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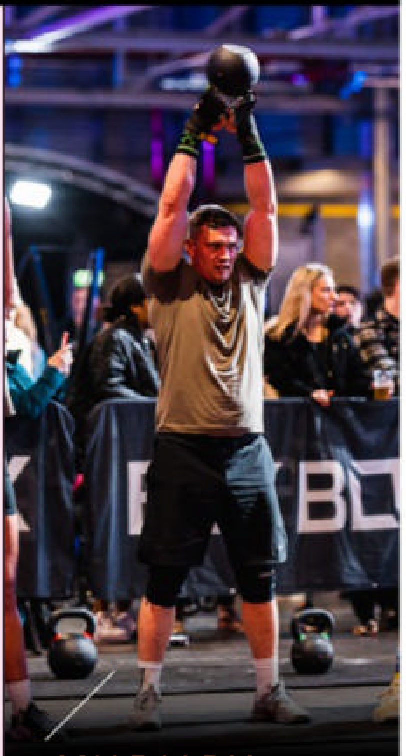
CAN FIBRE PILLS BOOST GUT HEALTH?



MH DIARY

P109

7 FITNESS CHALLENGES TO KICK-START 2023

£5 MUSCLE MEALS

STRETCH YOUR WINGS FURTHER

No Veganuary? No problem. Beef mince and chicken wings are versatile, affordable (and complementary) sources of protein. Batch-cook both to eat well all week long

01

WINGS WITH CHICKPEA SLAW

SHOP IT

We'll assume you have cooking oil and basic seasonings and sauces. This list ticks off everything else – and it comes in at just £25

- 450g lean beef mince
- 1 onion
- 2 green peppers
- 1 head garlic
- 1 tin diced tomatoes
- 1 tin red kidney beans
- 1 bunch coriander
- 250ml beef stock
- 450g chicken wings
- 500g plain yoghurt
- 1 lemon
- 1 tub of breadcrumbs
- 1 bag of chickpea ('gram') flour
- 1 bag of cornflour
- 1 bag (200-250g) coleslaw cabbage mix
- 1 tin chickpeas
- 1 sweet potato
- 1 butterhead lettuce

03

CHICKEN LETTUCE WRAPS

PREP IT

Cook these base recipes on Sunday to pack them into five meals for the week

CHILLI

01/ Add **1 tbsp olive oil** to a large pot over a medium high heat. Brown **450g beef mince,** about 10 mins. Add **1 chopped onion, 1 chopped green pepper** and **4 chopped garlic cloves**. Saute until the onions are translucent, about 3 mins.

02/ Add **1 tbsp ground cumin, 1 tbsp chilli powder** and **1 tsp salt.** Stir to combine. Add **1 tin of tomatoes, 1 tin of kidney beans** (rinsed and drained), and **250ml beef stock.** Stir well, boil, reduce the heat to low and cook until thickened, about 1 hr.

03/ Stir in **2 tbsp chopped coriander.** Season to taste and set aside.

WINGS

01/ Place **450g wings** and **250g plain yoghurt** in a large zip-top bag. Add **1 tsp salt** and the juice and zest of **½ lemon.** Seal the bag and mix well. Leave it to marinate for at least 1 hr.

02/ In another large zip-top bag, mix **75g breadcrumbs, 60g chickpea flour, 30g cornflour, ½ tsp salt** and **1 tsp** each **garlic powder, paprika** and **pepper.**

03/ Preheat the oven to 190°C. Transfer the drained wings to the other bag and toss. Put the wings on a lined baking tray and roast until browned, about 35 mins, flipping them after 15 mins. Set aside.

THE EXTRAS

01/ In a bowl, mix **250g plain yoghurt, 1 minced garlic clove, 2 tbsp chopped coriander,** the juice and zest of **½ lemon** and **1 tsp** each **onion powder, salt, sugar** and **pepper.** Cover and refrigerate.

02/ In a bowl, mix **1 bag coleslaw cabbage** with **1 tin drained and rinsed chickpeas.** Add about **120g** of the coriander ranch sauce you just made. Season with **1 tsp** each **salt** and **pepper.** Mix, cover and refrigerate.

03/ Cut a **sweet potato** into 1cm cubes and add to a pan over a medium heat, with **½ tsp salt** and **1 tbsp olive oil.** Saute till tender, about 15 mins. Divide into 2 portions.

02
CHICKEN SALAD & CHILLI
04
STUFFED PEPPERS
05
MEATY SWEET POTATO BOWL

WORDS: JENNIFER NICKLE. PHOTOGRAPHS: NICO SCHINCO. FOOD STYLING: REBECCA JURKEVICH. PROP STYLING: MAEVE SHERIDAN

PACK IT

Almost there: now let's make up your meals for the week

01/ CHICKEN WINGS WITH CHICKPEA SLAW

Add ⅓ of the wings to a container. In another container, add 250g of the chickpea slaw. In a separate small container, add 60g of the coriander ranch to use as a dipping sauce. Reheat the wings.

Per meal: 706 calories, 48g protein, 67g carbs (11g fibre), 27g fat

02/ CHICKEN SALAD & CHILLI

In a container, add 370g of chilli. In another, add 6 lettuce leaves (torn), 120g of slaw, half the remaining wings (shredded) and 2 tbsp of coriander ranch. Reheat the chilli.

Per meal: 922 calories, 68g protein, 85g carbs (19g fibre), 35g fat

03/ CHICKEN LETTUCE WRAPS

In a container, add half the sweet potato and the rest of the wings (shredded). In another, add 3 lettuce leaves. In a separate container, mix 2 tbsp ranch with 2 tsp sriracha. Reheat the potato mixture, spoon into lettuce cups and drizzle with the spicy ranch.

Per meal: 632 calories, 42g protein, 54g carbs (6g fibre), 27g fat

04/ STUFFED PEPPERS

In a bowl, mix 250g chilli, 90g cooked rice, 1 egg and ½ tsp salt. In a container, add a green bell pepper, sliced lengthwise, stem and seeds discarded. Divide the rice mixture between the two halves. Cover and reheat in the microwave for 60 secs at a time untill the egg is cooked. Top with sriracha.

Per meal: 418 calories, 25g protein, 54g carbs (9g fibre), 11g fat

05/ MEATY SWEET POTATO BOWL

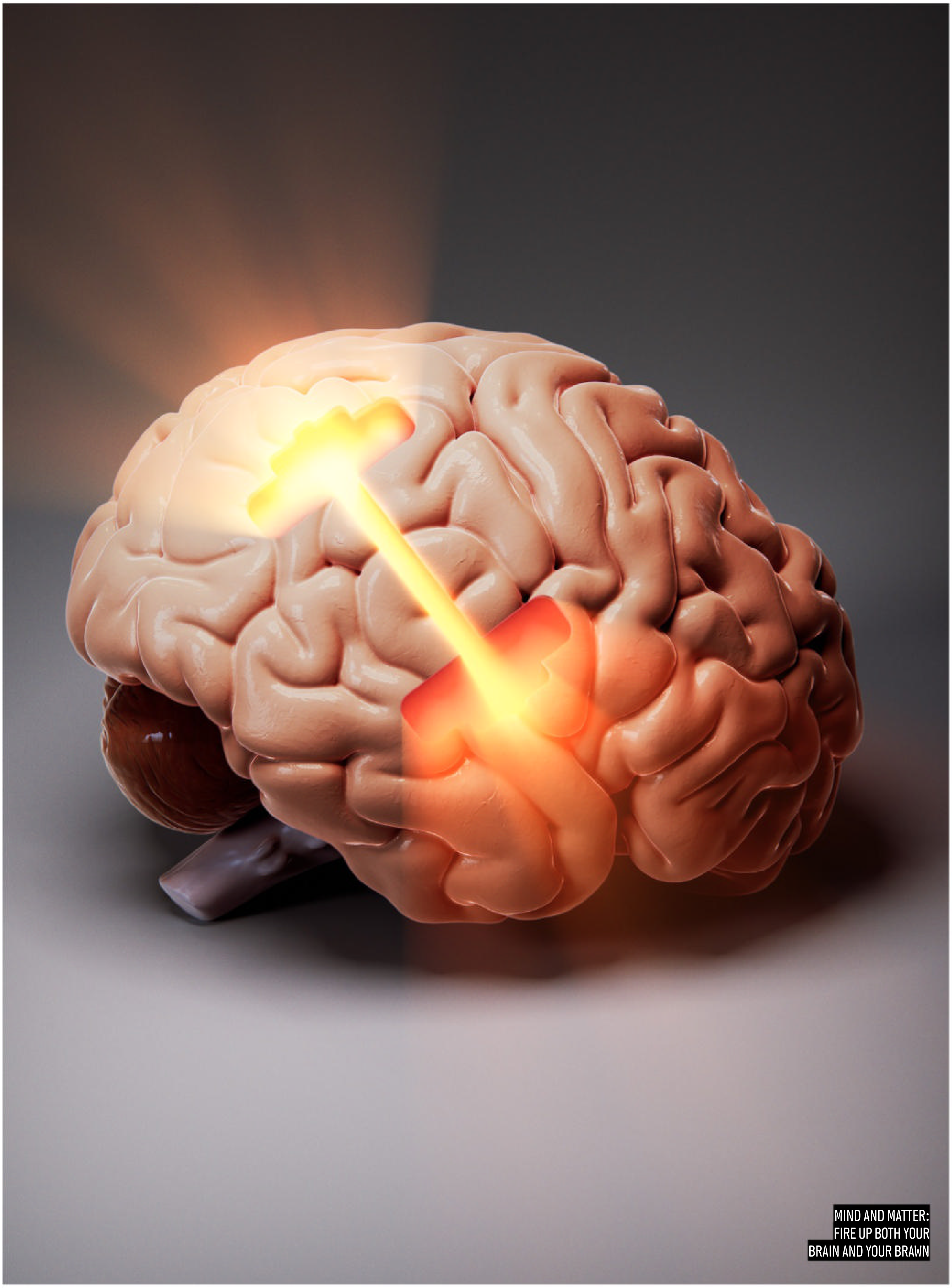
In a container, add 370g chilli and the remaining sweet potato cubes. In a separate container, mix 2 tbsp coriander ranch with 2 tsp sriracha. Reheat the chilli and drizzle with the spicy sauce.

Per meal: 432 calories, 25g protein, 47g carbs (32g fibre), 17g fat

Feel-Good HIITs

Low on motivation? Then the body part you need to target in your next workout is the one between your ears. With a little know-how, your new-year training sessions can help you sweat out stress and add muscle to your mental resilience. Try these six mood boosters for a lift

Words by Scarlett Wrench – Artwork by Peter Crowther



MIND AND MATTER: FIRE UP BOTH YOUR BRAIN AND YOUR BRAWN

Ten years ago, if you asked someone why they trained, they might have given you a range of answers. Some would have told you about their aesthetic goals; others would have been focused on improving their performance, or spoken of more holistic ambitions, such as longevity. But mental health? Less likely. We've always been aware that exercise makes us feel good, but a tendency to see the mind and body as separate meant that it was considered the domain of body transformations, not psychological boosts.

Today, most of us know that, just as your heart, lungs, muscles and bones can be strengthened by exercise, so, too, can your brain. Regular exercise is a proven strategy for enhancing your mental wellbeing.

In one analysis, published in *The American Journal Of Psychiatry*, those who trained for just two and a half hours each week had a risk of depression 31% lower than those who didn't. It has been shown to rival antidepressant medications in its efficacy. And, according to one Bristol University study, people score higher for both focus and motivation on days when they exercise.

'Exercise is overlooked as a medicine for mental health, largely because we put so much focus on its aesthetic effects,' says Hendrick Famutimi (@supermanhf), a British powerlifting champion and instructor at Equinox. 'If more of us promoted the mental health benefits of exercise, more people would place it higher on their priorities list.'

Dan Hancock is a personal trainer based in Stirling, Scotland, who runs the Mental Health and Exercise Coaching Gym. 'I realised that many of the clients who came to me to change their bodies were, deep down, struggling with their mental health,' he says. 'Most people put fat loss first, but I prefer to focus on mental stability and mental strength.'

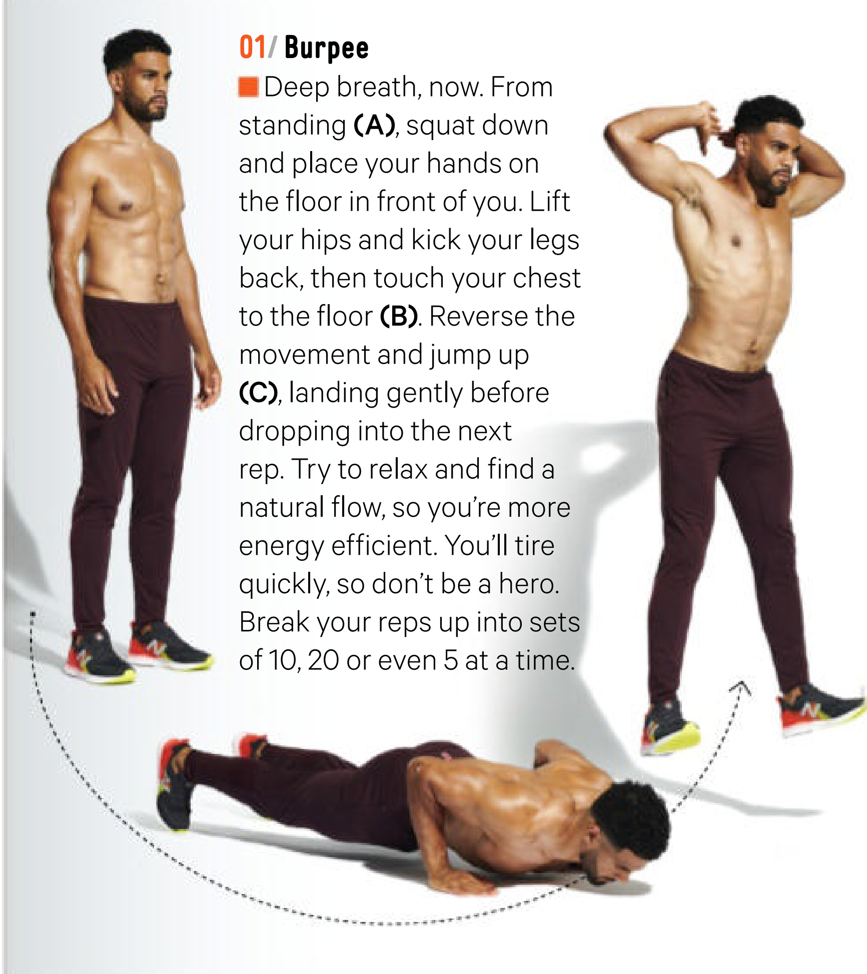
In need of a booster shot this month? We asked Famutimi and Hancock to share their favourite feel-good workouts. On these pages, you won't find targets for calories burned or muscles worked – though these exercises will, of course, tick both boxes. Instead, we've spelled out exactly how each can help you feel your best.

01 Chase A High In Double Time

Challenging exercise is thought to boost the brain's stocks of mood-lifting neurotransmitter serotonin – an effect that is amplified by any activity that fires up your competitive instincts.

This partner workout hits the sweet spot: both tough enough to test you (and your teammate) yet eminently doable. It's a guaranteed buzz for all but the most committed lone wolves.

THE FORMAT Complete 100 burpees (well, we said it would be effective, not easy). You can split those reps 50/50, or opt for closer to 60/40 if you're fitter than your partner. While one of you performs the burpees, the other holds a forearm plank. 'The added pressure of watching your teammate struggle will push you to finish your reps faster,' says Hancock.

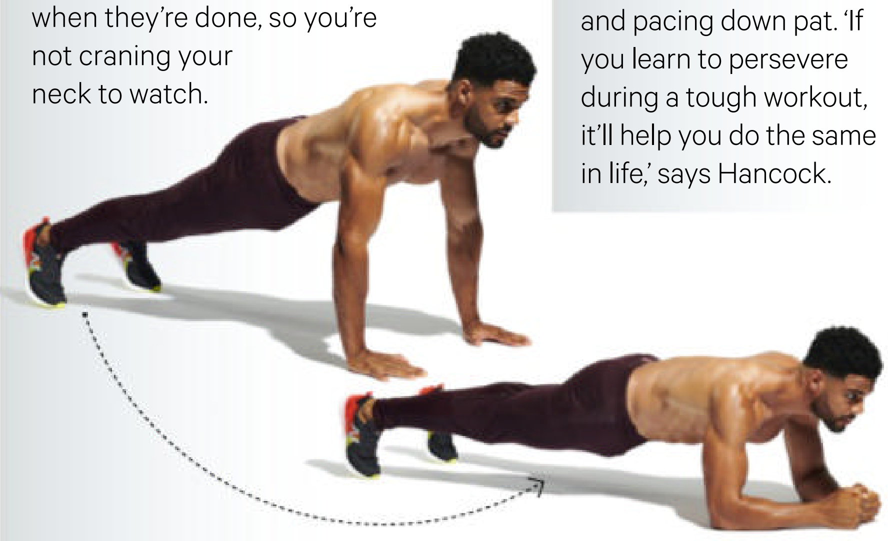


01/ Burpee

■ Deep breath, now. From standing **(A)**, squat down and place your hands on the floor in front of you. Lift your hips and kick your legs back, then touch your chest to the floor **(B)**. Reverse the movement and jump up **(C)**, landing gently before dropping into the next rep. Try to relax and find a natural flow, so you're more energy efficient. You'll tire quickly, so don't be a hero. Break your reps up into sets of 10, 20 or even 5 at a time.

02/ Plank

■ Stack your elbows beneath your shoulders or lock out your arms – whichever works for you **(A)**. Your body should form a straight line. Squeeze your glutes if you're struggling – your biggest muscles will help to steady you and prevent your hips from sagging. Ask your partner to tap you on the shoulder when they're done, so you're not craning your neck to watch.



03/ The Challenge

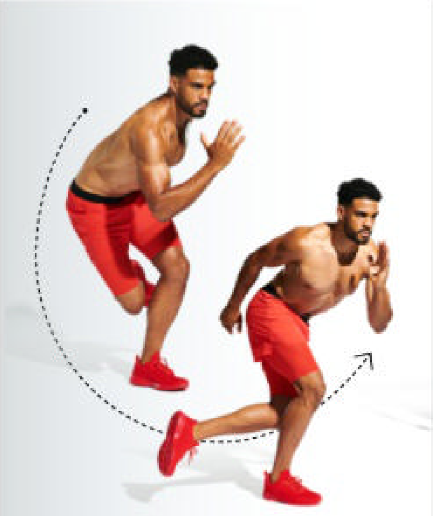
■ Record the time it took you to reach 100 reps. Rest for 3 mins, then go again. Try to match (or better still, beat) your previous score. The downside: your legs, shoulders and core will be fatigued. The upside: you should have the technique and pacing down pat. 'If you learn to persevere during a tough workout, it'll help you do the same in life,' says Hancock.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP HAYNES. MODEL: LEE MCLAUGHLIN AT W MODEL. STYLING: ABENA OFEI. GROOMING: NAT SCHMITT USING CLARINS SKINCARE

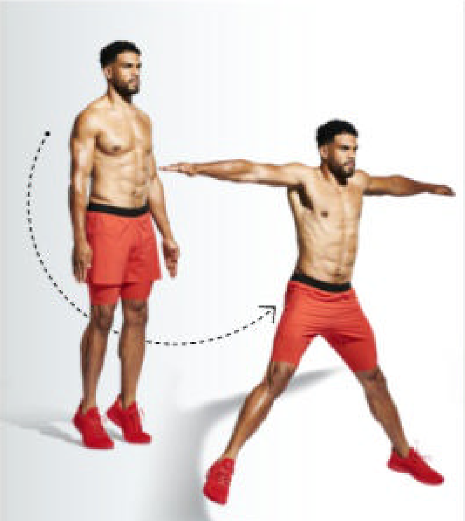
02 Wake Up On The Right Side

You don't need to stumble straight from bed to the squat rack, but getting a sweat on before work boosts alertness. Plus, it'll keep your sleep cycle in sync. According to the *British Medical Journal*, a moderate-intensity session such as this will release the chemical BDNF, which improves working memory and decision-making. It'll last longer than an espresso, too.

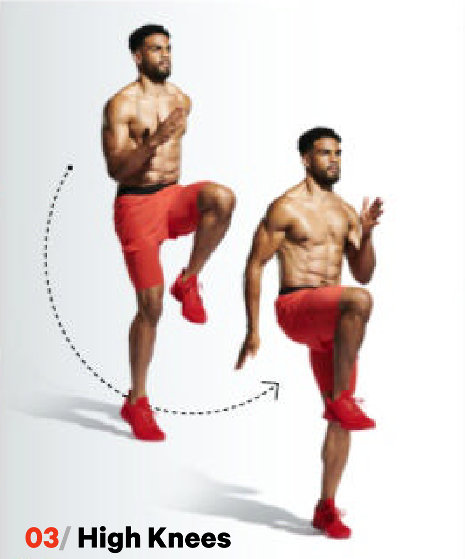
THE FORMAT Set up your timer. Perform the exercises in turn for 30 secs each with no rest. Once you've done all eight, take a break for 60 secs and repeat for three rounds in total. 'Remember, you always have one more rep inside you than you think you do,' says Famutimi. If you're not currently commuting, this is the ideal use of that extra hour.



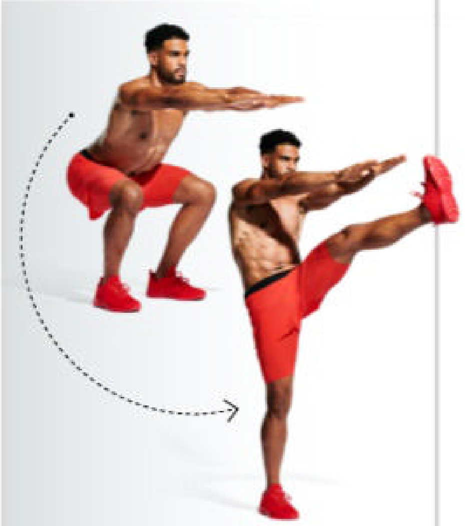
01/ Skater Jump
■ Dip at the knees and lean forwards. Bound to the right, landing on your right foot, with your left leg bent behind you. Now bound to the left. This will challenge your balance and agility, too.



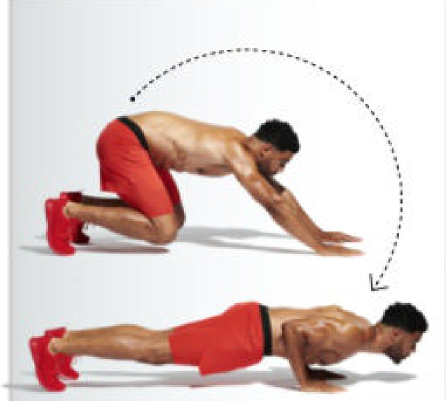
02/ Air Jack
■ Perform a jumping jack but, as you jump, kick your legs out to the sides so your body forms an X-shape in mid-air. Land softly with your knees slightly bent and go straight into the next rep.



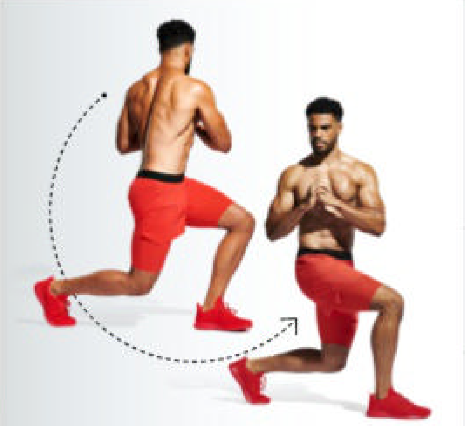
03/ High Knees
■ You can do this on the spot or, if you're outdoors, run back and forth. Pump your arms and lift your knees as high as they'll go to open up your hips and get your heart pumping.



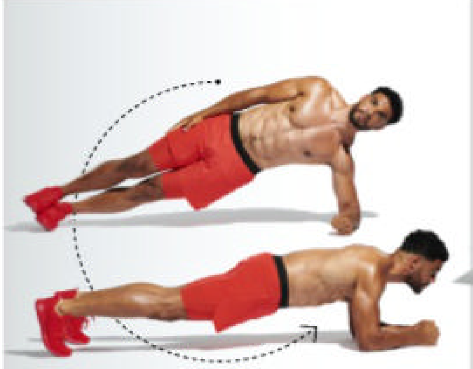
04/ Squat To Kick
■ Perform a body-weight squat, keeping your chest up and ensuring your knees track over your feet, rather than turning inwards. Move smoothly into a high kick when you reach the top of the rep.



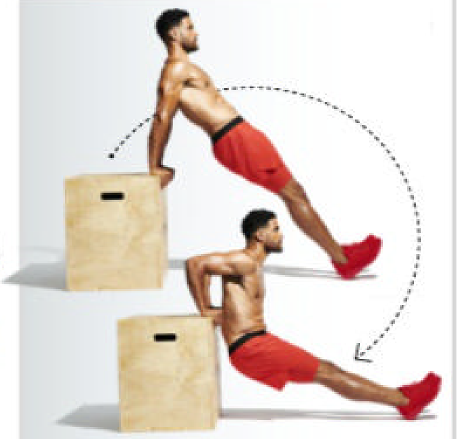
05/ Beast To Press-Up
■ Place your hands on the ground with your arms stretched, knees bent and weight on your toes. Push forwards into a press-up, sinking until your chest brushes the floor. Push back to the start.



06/ Reverse Lunge To Twist
■ Step back into a lunge so both legs are bent at right angles. Twist towards the front leg, then push back to standing and switch sides. These feel easy at first, but the burn sets in quickly.



07/ Plank To Side Raise
■ Begin in a forearm plank. Lift one arm to twist up into a side plank. Pause, return, switch sides. By strengthening your core, this will also improve your posture – a proven mood enhancer.



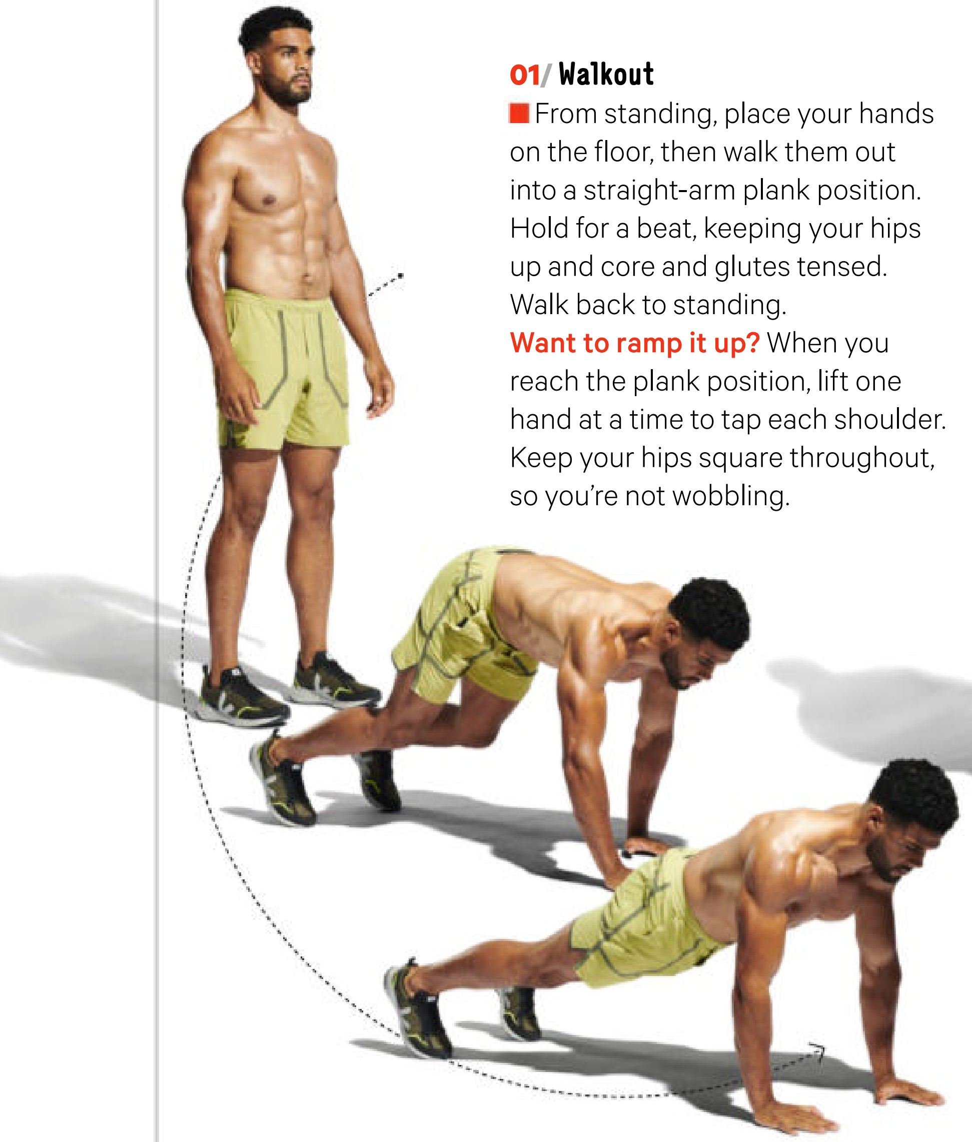
08/ Body-Weight Dip
■ Finish with a triceps burner. Place your hands on the edge of a box or chair, facing away from it with your legs straight. Bend your elbows to lower until you feel a stretch, then push back up.

The Quick Lift Caffeine doesn't just boost energy; it gives our mood and motivation a bump, as well as blocking adenosine receptors to reduce the perception of fatigue. In other words? It's the closest thing you'll get to bottled endorphins. Myprotein's The Pre-Workout+ (£35, myprotein.com) uses a dual-phase release system to give you both an immediate hit and a steady stream of get-up-and-go-for-it.

03 An Express Energy Boost

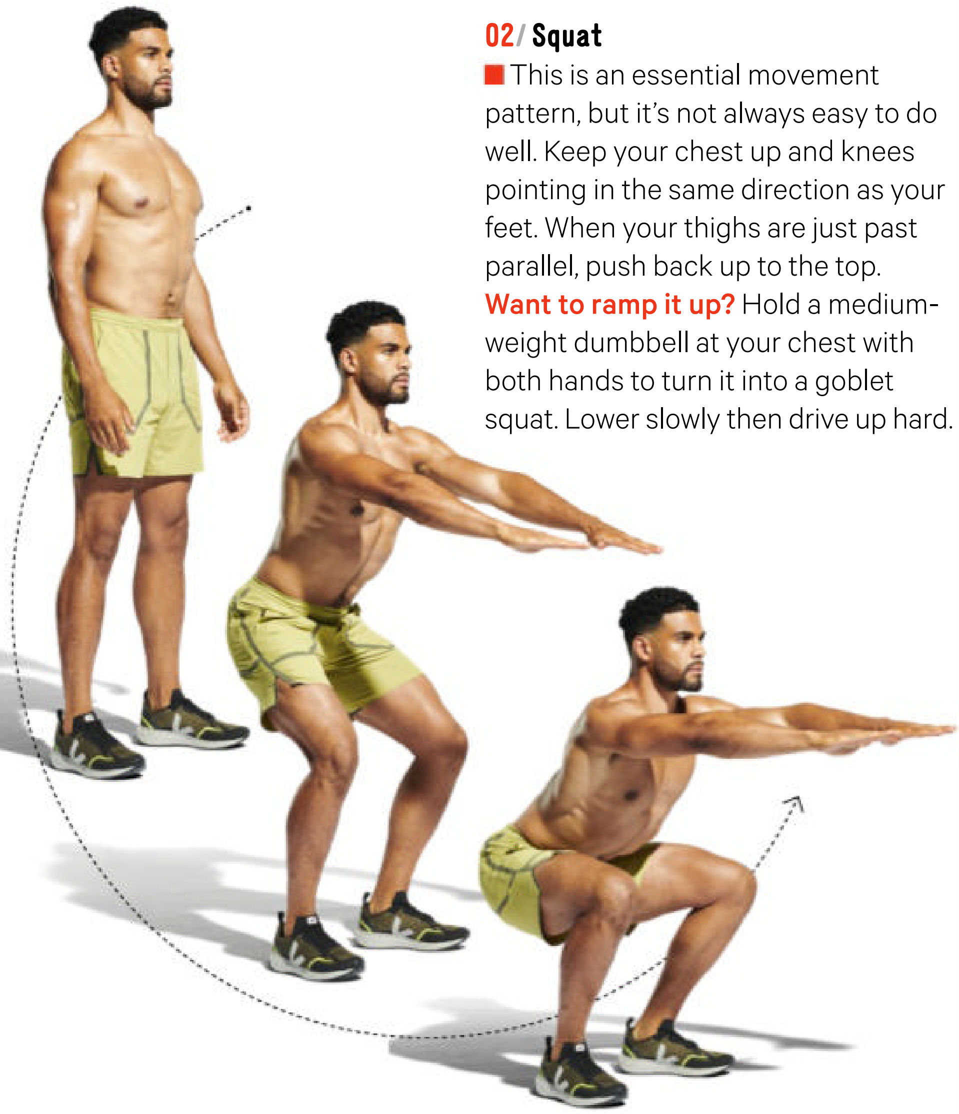
Exercise may be an energiser, but when you're feeling burned out, overtaxing your body can be counterproductive. This 20-minute full-body workout activates multiple muscle groups to boost blood flow to your brain and kick your motivation up a gear. The steady pace moderates cortisol release, so you won't feel depleted afterwards. In other words, it's tailored for your WFH lunch breaks.

THE FORMAT Start with 12 reps of each exercise back to back, then do 11, 10, and so on, down to 1 rep of each. 'It's a short, sharp blast that's perfect if you're low on time and inspiration,' says Hancock. 'The descending format means there's no chance you won't finish; your competitive streak will kick in.' If it's too easy, dial it up with our suggested progressions.



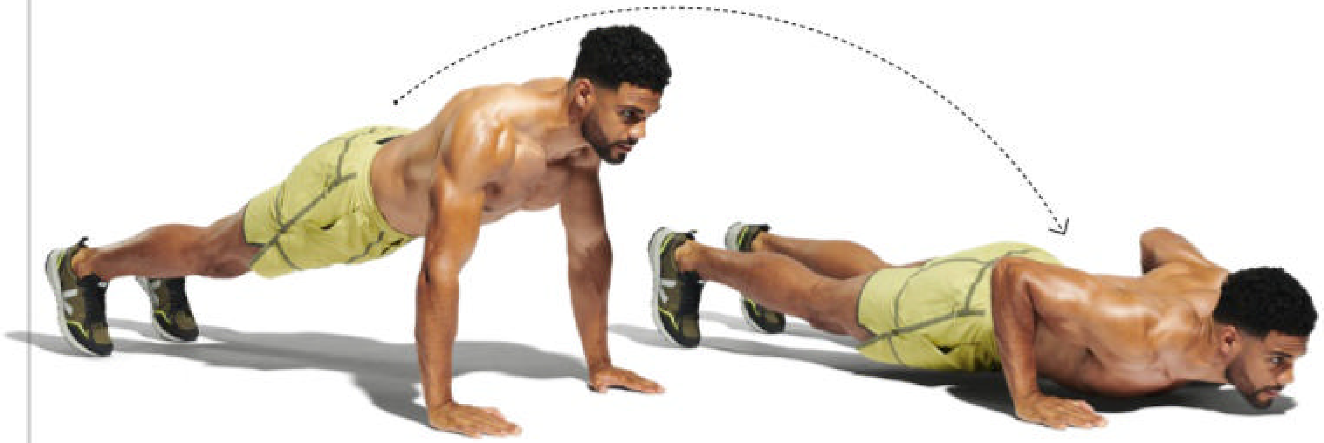
01/ Walkout

■ From standing, place your hands on the floor, then walk them out into a straight-arm plank position. Hold for a beat, keeping your hips up and core and glutes tensed. Walk back to standing. **Want to ramp it up?** When you reach the plank position, lift one hand at a time to tap each shoulder. Keep your hips square throughout, so you're not wobbling.



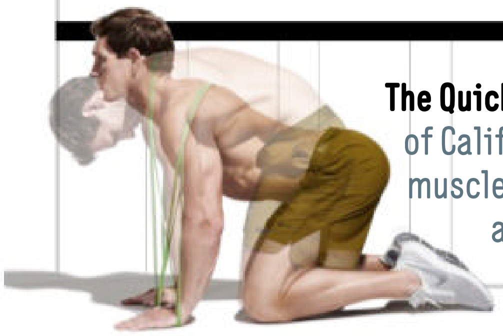
02/ Squat

■ This is an essential movement pattern, but it's not always easy to do well. Keep your chest up and knees pointing in the same direction as your feet. When your thighs are just past parallel, push back up to the top. **Want to ramp it up?** Hold a medium-weight dumbbell at your chest with both hands to turn it into a goblet squat. Lower slowly then drive up hard.



03/ Press-Up

■ With your hands slightly wider than your shoulders and your arms and body straight, lower by bending your elbows. When your chest touches the ground, exhale as you push up. **Want to ramp it up?** As you lower your body, lift your right foot, swing your leg out and try to touch your knee to your elbow. Swap sides with each rep.



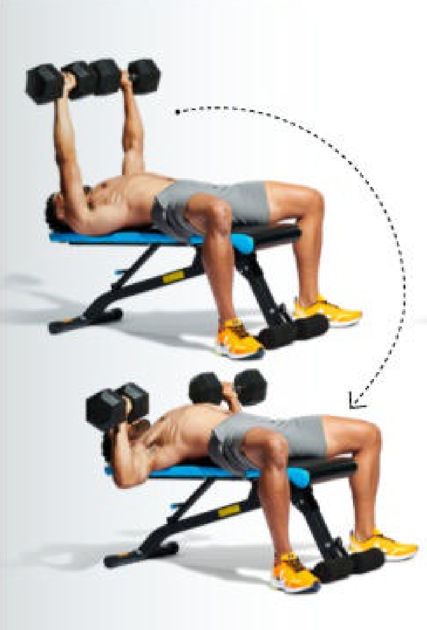
The Quick Lift Taking a rest day? It's still worth including some mobility and abs work. In a University of California study, low-impact stretching was found to reduce cortisol levels, while stronger core muscles improve deep, diaphragmatic breathing. Try 10 minutes of cat cows, thoracic rotations and hip circles, or controlled breathing while standing against a wall with your arms overhead.

MODEL (CAT COW): MARK THOMPSON AT W MODEL

04 Pump Up Those Endorphins

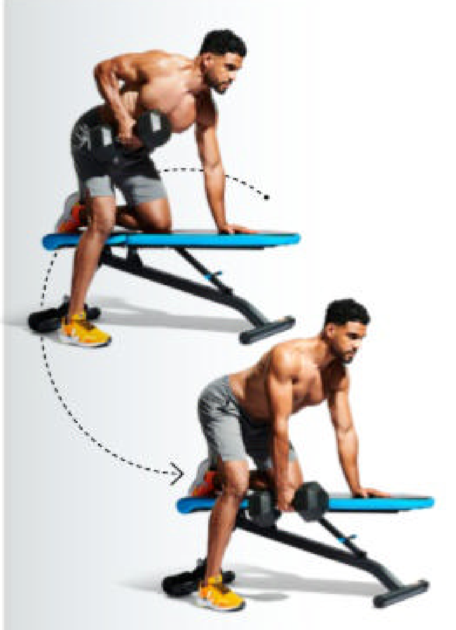
Arnie once claimed that 'the pump' was better than sex. We don't know about that, but studies show that old-school weightlifting has a potent antidepressant effect, regardless of your ability level. (Good news for cardioheads.) This ultimate Friday guns sesh delivers a flood of painkilling endorphins, as well as a temporary spike in adrenaline. Arm yourself.

THE FORMAT Perform three sets of 12 to 15 reps for each of the supersets below. For the supersets, perform each pair of exercises back to back without resting. Break as needed between supersets – but try to keep your heart rate up. 'Finish with five interval sprints: 30 secs moderate speed, 30 secs fast,' says Famutimi. 'That'll sort your endorphin rush.'



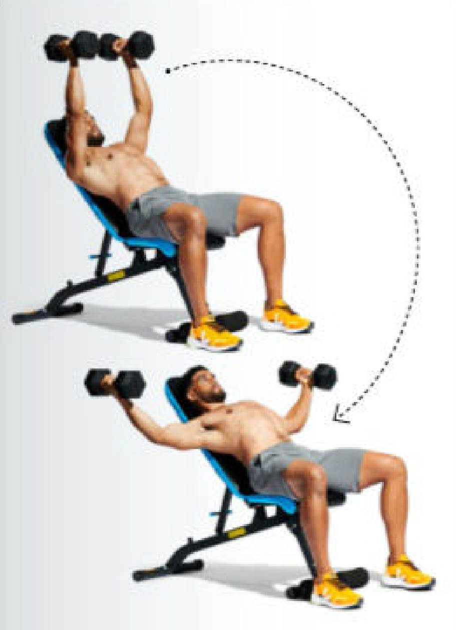
01A/ Chest Press

Lie on a bench with two dumbbells above your chest and your arms extended. Lower the weights to your sides until you feel a slight stretch across your chest, then exhale as you press back up to the top again.



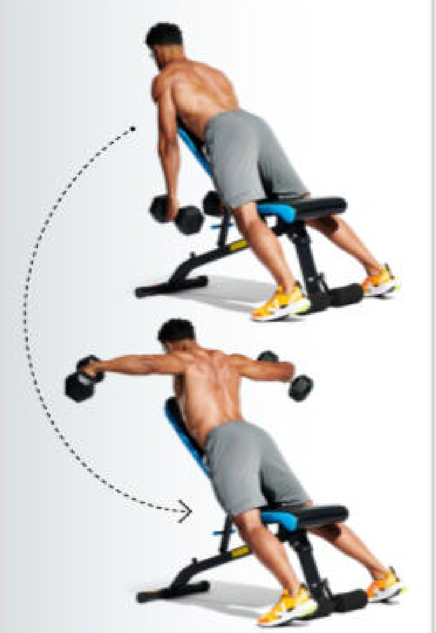
01B/ Single-Arm Row

Stand up and rest one hand and a knee on a bench. Pull the dumbbell to the bottom of your ribs, squeezing your shoulder blade. Lower to the start. Do half of your reps, then switch arms.



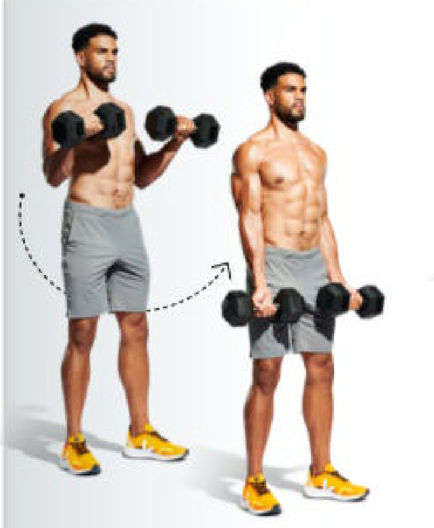
02A/ Incline Chest Fly

Hold the dumbbells above your chest with your arms slightly bent. Lower them outwards in an arch until you feel a stretch across your chest, maintaining a bend in your elbows. Now, bring them back in.



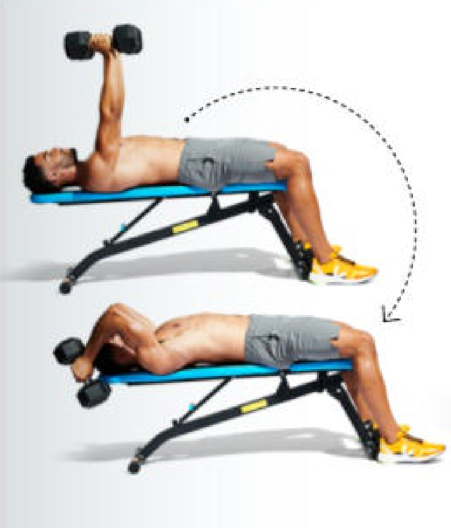
02B/ Reverse Fly

Turn around to rest your chest on the bench, with the dumbbells hanging at your sides. Squeeze your shoulder blades together to bring them out to your sides, then return to the start.



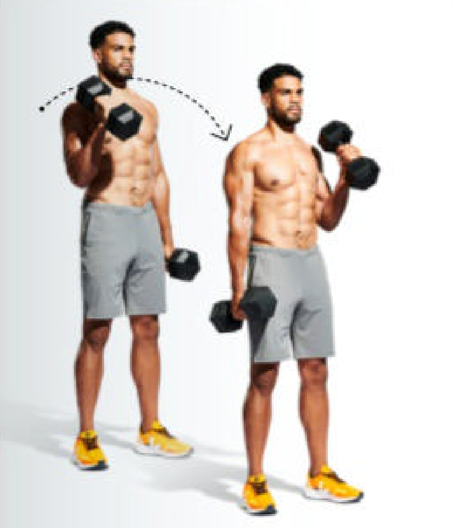
03A/ Zottman Curl

Hold the weights at your thighs with your palms facing forwards and core braced. Curl towards your shoulders, rotate your wrists and lower with your palms facing down.



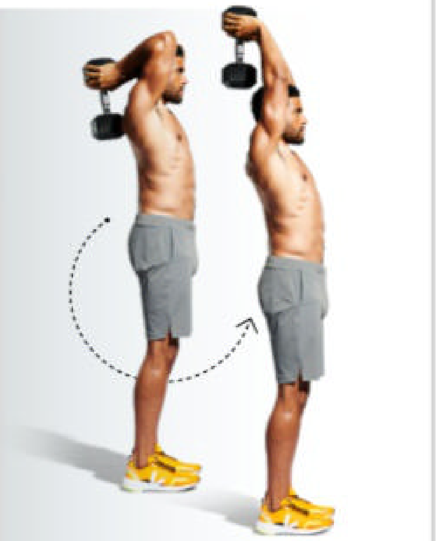
03B/ Skull Crusher

Get back on the bench and lie down. Start with the weights positioned overhead, then lower until your elbows are bent by the sides of your head. Tense your triceps to return to the top.



04A/ Hammer Curl

Stand with the weights hanging at your sides. Keeping your elbows tucked to your sides, raise one dumbbell until your thumb brushes your shoulder. Lower to the start and switch arms.



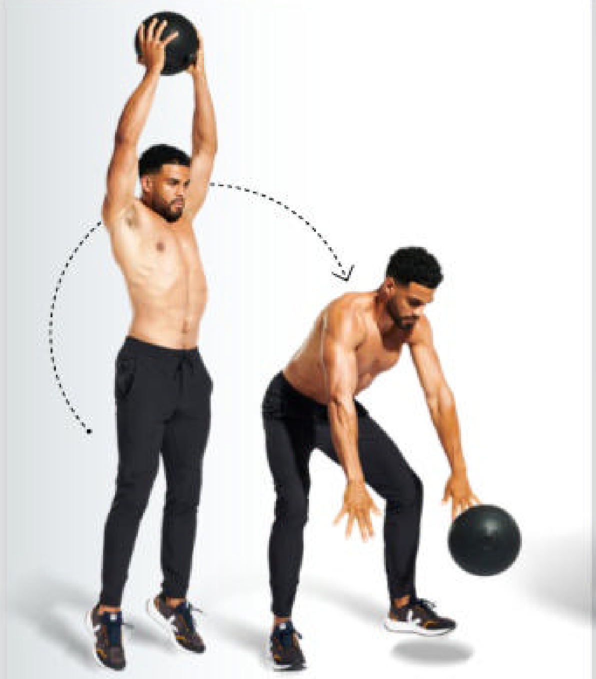
04B/ Triceps Extension

Drop one dumbbell and stand holding the other overhead with both hands. Bracing your core, bend your elbows to lower the weight behind your head. Push up until your arms are straight.

05 Slam Down Stress Levels

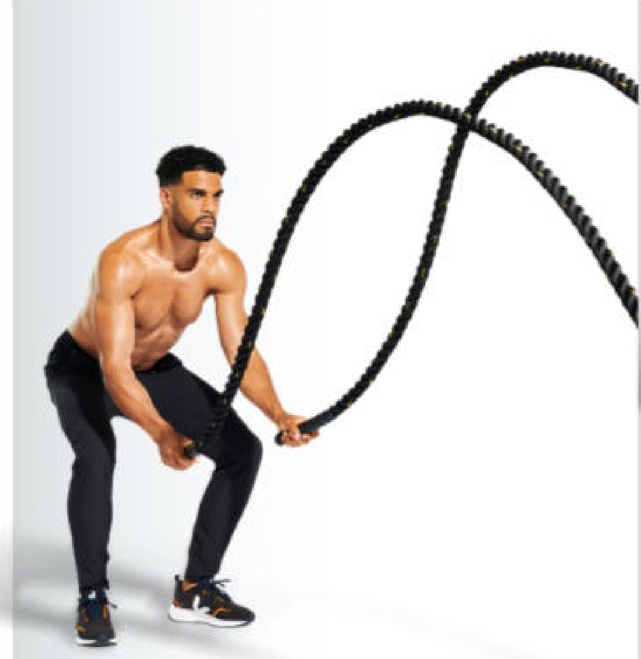
For some, yoga is an effective salve for the frustrations of modern life. For others, slamming and sprinting are more productive ways to burn through daily anxieties and restore serenity. Working in short, powerful bursts is ideal for relieving muscle tension, while a University of Georgia study found that stressed people feel calmer after hard exercise. The gym won't know what hit it.

THE FORMAT 'With this workout, you don't need to worry about rep counts or which weights you want to use,' says Hancock. 'Just set a timer and get to it.' Perform these six moves for 40 secs each and complete four rounds in total, resting for 60 secs at the end of each. Make sure you have all of your kit set up so you're not tripping over the ropes mid-shuttle.



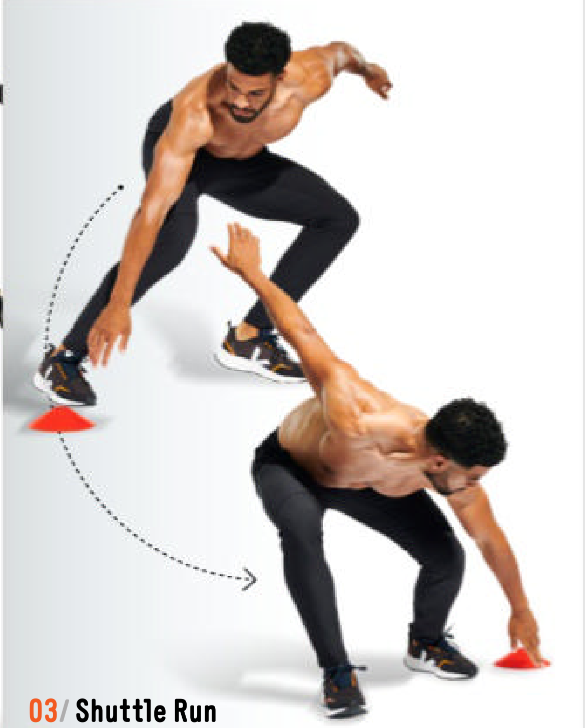
01/ Ball Slam

Stand with your feet at shoulder-width, then lift the slam ball above your head while fully extending your body. Throw it to the ground in front of you, dipping your knees to catch it on the bounce and propelling it back up for the next rep.



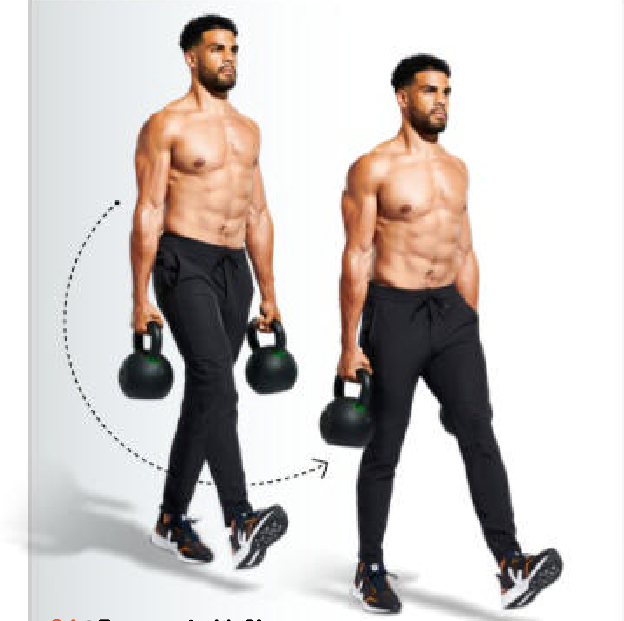
02/ Battle Rope Slam

Next, grab a rope end in each hand and bend your knees. In one explosive movement, lift the ropes to shoulder height, rising up on to your toes, then slam the ropes down. Move straight into the next rep, making sure that you maintain a rhythm.



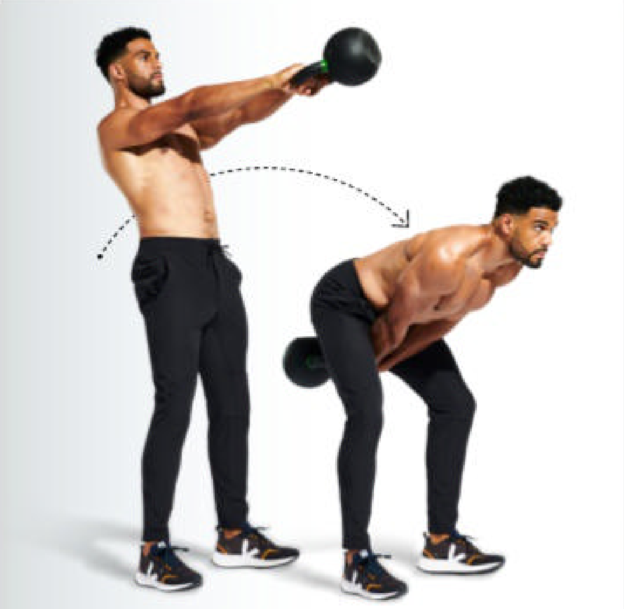
03/ Shuttle Run

Now, drop the ropes and run back and forth between two markers, tapping the ground between your feet as you turn. If you don't have the space to run in your gym, you can sub in jumping jacks or bunny hops over a bench.



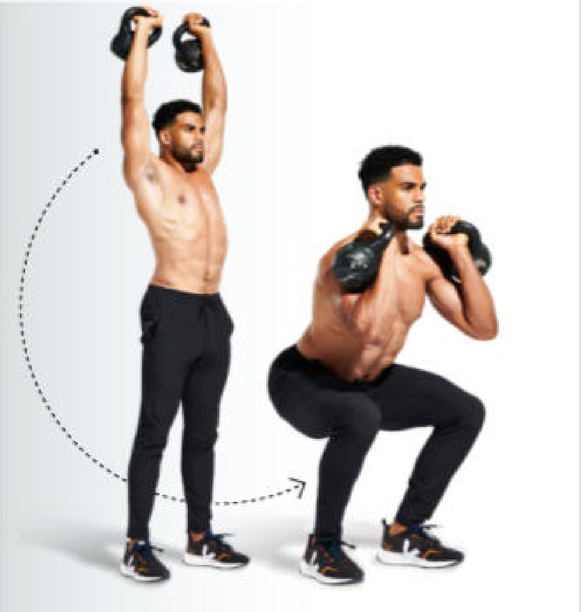
04/ Farmer's Walk

Grab two heavy kettlebells. Retract your shoulder blades, tighten your abs and carry the weights back and forth. This will allow your heart rate to come down before you start swinging...



05/ Kettlebell Swing

Grab a lighter weight if necessary. Bend at your hips, keeping your back straight, then drive your hips forwards to swing the weight up until your arms are parallel to the floor, allowing momentum to carry it back.



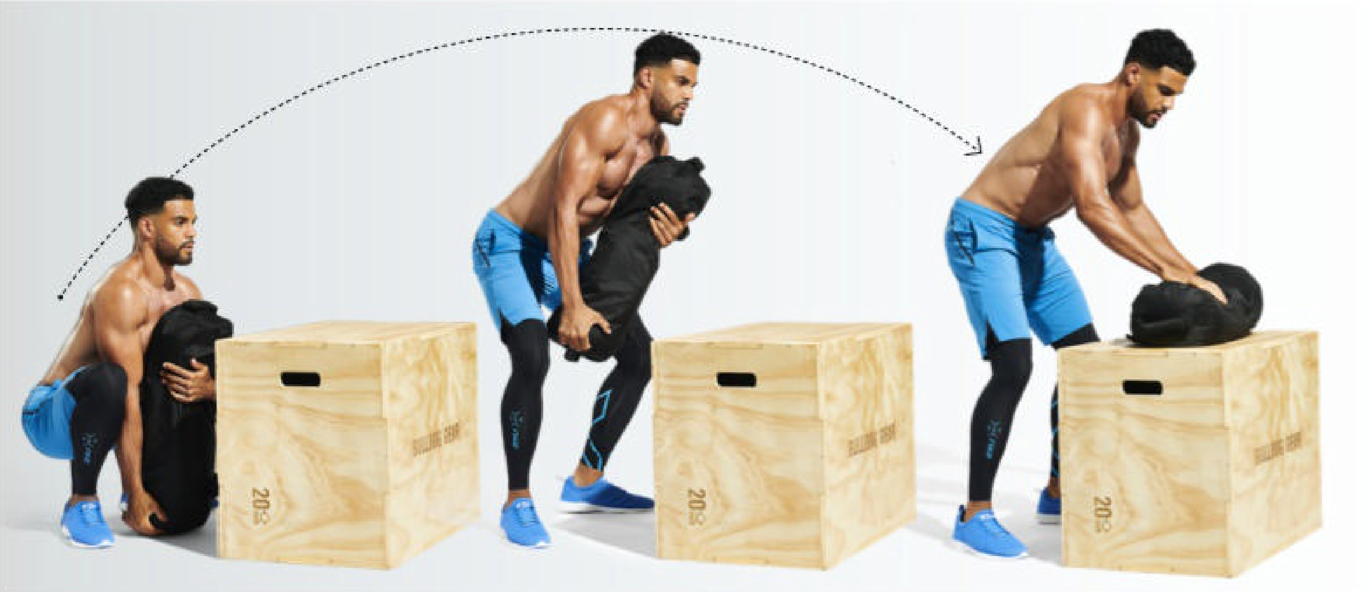
06/ Kettlebell Thruster

Holding two kettlebells in a rack position, drop into a squat, keeping your chest up. Accelerate as you reach the top of the squat and drive the weights overhead until your arms are extended. Drop back into a squat.

06 Recharge Your Resilience

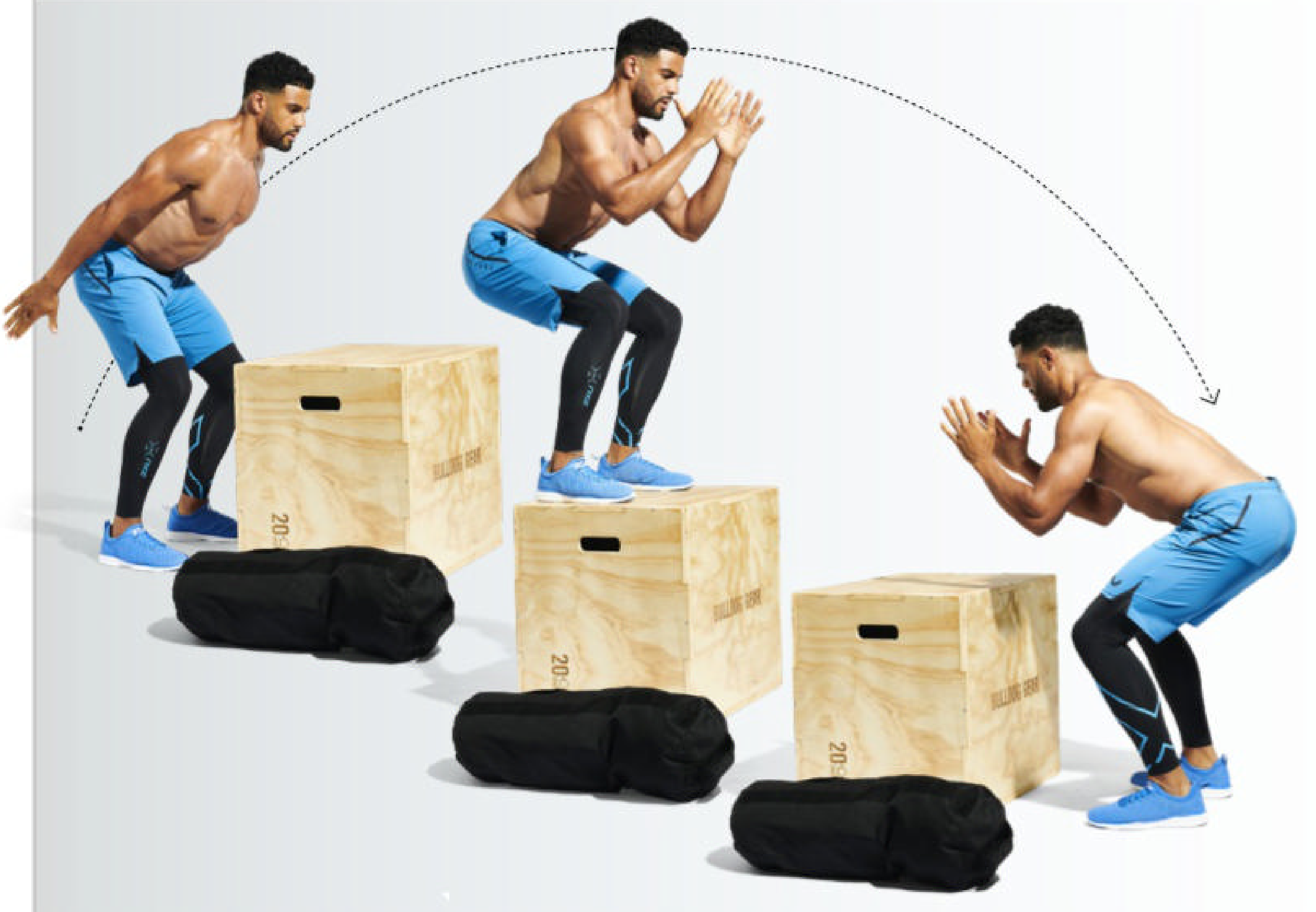
Tough workouts forge tough mindsets: exposure to adrenaline through exercise increases your tolerance to it, so you'll be better able to regulate your arousal response when it's a staff meeting that has your heart pounding, rather than a final set of box jumps. Complete this bite-sized session and know that whatever the day throws at you, you'll take it in your stride.

THE FORMAT Set a time cap of five, 10 or 15 mins. 'Pick your time limit according to how energised you are, or how you want to feel,' says Famutimi. You're going to be moving between two simple exercises: sandbag lifts and box jumps. 'You may feel fatigued physically, but your mind will no longer be running at 100 miles an hour.' Consider it meditation in action.



01/ Sandbag Lift

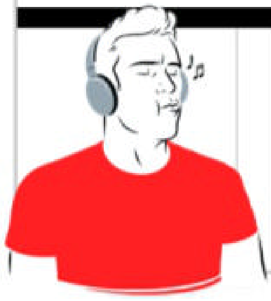
Set up a box in front of you with the sandbag or D-ball on the floor. Straddle the sandbag, squat and get your hand underneath it. Keeping your back straight, lift the sandbag up until it's resting on your thighs, with your arms hugging it and hands gripped together. Push it on to the top of the box. Don't go too heavy: that's just one rep, remember.



02/ Box Jump

Push the sandbag off the box, then dip your knees. Swing your arms behind you for momentum as you drop into a shallow squat, then swing them forwards as you jump up on to the platform, landing with both feet together. Hop back down, pick up the sandbag and go again.

The Challenge
'Your final rep count is your score,' says Famutimi. 'Try again in a week or so and aim to beat it.' This one will push you into your pain cave, so be careful not to rush those lifts. The more tired you get, the clumsier you'll become. Strong and steady wins the race.



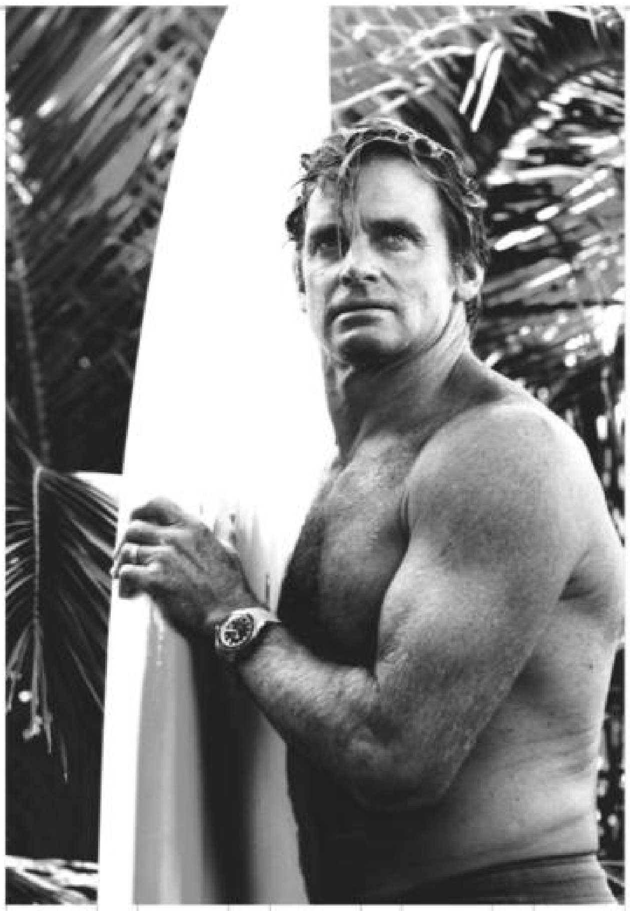
The Quick Lift High-intensity workouts might feel pretty taxing in the moment, but according to the *British Journal Of Sports Medicine*, they activate the brain's cannabinoid receptors – the ones that get switched on by, you guessed it, cannabis. This contributes to deep post-workout relaxation. Maximise the effect with a recovery playlist of slow-paced tracks (about 70bpm), which lowers cortisol.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID NEWTON; GETTY IMAGES. ILLUSTRATION: BEN MOUNSEY-WOOD

PT FIT AT ANY AGE

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

Well, older at any rate... **Laird Hamilton** will go down as the greatest giant-riding surfer of all time, but at 58 years old, the ultimate waterman is still making waves



MH: You're still as famous for what you get up to on a surfboard as you were in your twenties and thirties. How have you managed it?

LH: Well, I have a couple of things on my side. One of them is that my platform – my sport, my art – is not restricted by a structure that would make it more difficult to stay at the top. You see older guys in other sports, such as Tom Brady or Roger Federer, and your ability to participate decreases as the younger guys come in. With surfing, you don't have to be in a structure like that. You don't have to tour around and be a part of a season and all that stuff. So that helps.

> ‘YOU HAVE TO LOVE WHAT YOU DO AND REALLY WANT TO DO IT. I'VE PUT A LOT OF EFFORT AND THOUGHT INTO RETAINING MY PASSION’

Passion is a big piece of it, too. You have to like what you do – love what you do and really want to do it. Sometimes it's easy to get burned out because you've done it for so long. The schedule is brutal, the training is brutal. You just tap out. So retaining that passion is crucial. I've put a lot of effort and conscious thought into retaining my passion. I always use the quote ‘retain your youthful enthusiasm’. It should be something fun. Make it interesting, make it exciting. Make it something you're learning.

I also make the effort to keep myself in one piece. I envy the guy who's in his forties, hasn't done much and everything works! His hips are good, the knees are good, the shoulders are good. You just need to have the discipline to work out a little. And you don't make it an option. You don't say that you might eat today, or you might not eat today. Or drink water or sleep or breathe. These aren't options; they're just things you do. Exercising needs to be one of those things you do.

Personally, I have to recover and rebuild the pieces after all my injuries. The truth is, I'm all in: my diet, my lifestyle, my sleep. Everything I do is to support the system. That includes making sure your relationships are good and that there are no distractions or deterrents from being positive. It's a daily struggle. Everyone thinks that the grass is always greener, but when you get over there, it's just grass. We've all got the same things we need to deal with. It's our approach and techniques that are different.

MH: Has that routine evolved over the years? How different is it to the way you approached life, say, 20 years ago?

LH: Well, I used to drink alcohol, so one thing I've done for my overall wellbeing is stop drinking. That's one of the most challenging things that we can do. But the overall philosophy to my approach hasn't changed that much. It's all about diversity: some lifting, some cardio stuff, some stretching and some activities. I like doing activities because it distracts you. If you go and ride a stationary bike, 20 minutes in and you're just looking at the clock. If you go out for a paddle in nature, or go ride a bike in the mountains, not only are you getting the benefits of nature, but you're distracted. An hour and a half in, you're not even thinking about the time.

The biggest change is that I'm aware of things that can undermine my overall wellness. I try to avoid any ego in my training. It's hard not to grab the big weights and ride for five hours, but you learn to listen to your body. That comes with maturity. You listen better.

MH: How has your attitude towards the ocean changed? Do you ever look back and think what you did was crazy?

LH: I hate to say it, and it's probably a sign of a lack of maturity, but I don't ever look back at situations and wonder

→

20m

HAMILTON HAS SURFED WAVES MORE THAN 70FT HIGH

what I was doing or thinking about. Okay, so maybe like the cover of *National Geographic* where I'm just wearing surf shorts and no flotation protection. We were flying by the seat of our pants and there was a lot more exposure then. But we just didn't know. You can't blame yourself for not knowing.

In terms of my appreciation of it all, I think I would have soaked it in a bit more. A friend always tells the story of how at one point he was eating a lot of ice cream. He was eating pints of it every day and people would tell him that he was addicted. He replied that he could stop any time, so he stopped eating ice cream. Then he was watching a programme about a woman who was 105 years old and she was asked, 'What would you do differently?' She said, 'I would enjoy the moment more and I'd eat more ice cream.' So he went straight to the fridge, grabbed a giant tub of ice cream and ate the whole thing.

My point is, be more appreciative of those unique moments, about why you're doing it. Soak in more rather than being so quick to devour it and move on to the next thing. Anything you do that's special to you, try to absorb it more. Be in it, while you're in it.

> 'THE OCEAN IS ALIVE. IT HAS BEEN MY UNIVERSITY AND MY CHURCH, MY HOSPITAL AND THERAPY. IT CURES YOUR SPIRIT'

MH: Are there any other athletes in other sports that you feel affinity with?

LH: In the pursuit of mastery, I think there are only similarities. I relate much more to Tom Brady than to most people who surf. What I do and the way I approach it is completely different to other surfers. That pursuit of mastery, that refinement – the polishing of the stone – is something certain people share, regardless of their field. Those people can often switch to something else and have the same level of success. It's down to curiosity as much as it is discipline. You're constantly willing to learn and that's another huge piece of the process. Smart guys say they don't know anything.

MH: How much of 'polishing the stone' is about failure rather than success?

LH: It's what it means to you. How does failure sit with you? Are you okay with it? Show me a good loser and I'll show you a loser. If you talk to any of the top guys, the times they missed, or lost, or failed – those are at the top of their mind. Not the games won. That's what sharpens the tip of the spear. Those failures are the ones that shape and drive you. They are hugely impactful and motivating.

But then failure for me can also mean death, or at least serious injury. My body is like, 'Hey! We can't let this happen again!' It's evolutionary. It's a deep biological response.

MH: Was there a situation you can pinpoint when you failed and learned?

LH: I watched that documentary about [free climber] Alex Honnold, and it focused on the point his brain changed, so he didn't get scared. I think he was exposed to a lot of circumstances we'd consider death-defying at a young age. It takes a lot of work in your own systems to get over that, to recalibrate. Personally, I was rescued a lot as a child. I was in rip currents, getting sucked out to sea on a regular basis. As a child, these things feel huge, and I thought I was going to drown a lot when I was growing up. But it happened so often that then I thought maybe I wasn't going to drown. I recalibrated.

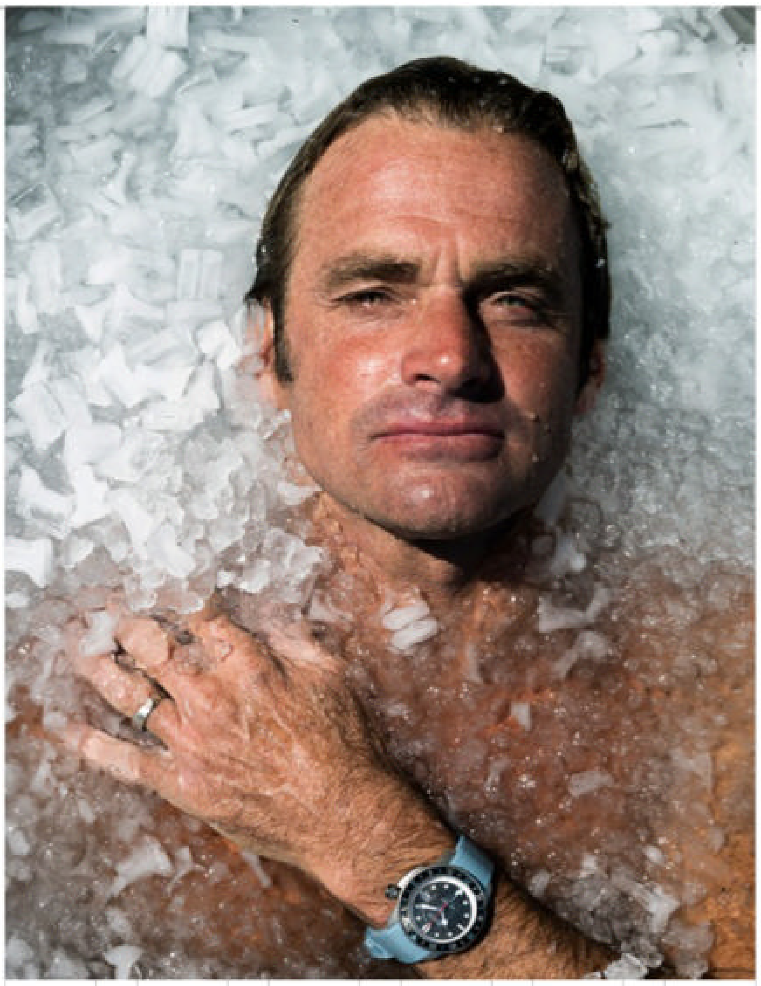
MH: Do you feel like you were born to be in the water?

LH: First, I think there are exceptions to every rule. But my stepdad used to say that big-wave riders are born and not made. They can come from anywhere; they just have a calling to it. But when you have someone with the natural disposition and skill, and then they're placed in an environment from an early age where they can lean into it, that's when you see real affinity. It can almost seem unreal. It seems to the layman as impossible. As magic. But it's being naturally suited to something and then having the perfect incubation.

MH: What has changed about your sport since you've been in it?

LH: The same as all sports. I think there's a lot of distraction and not so much of a foundation. Kids are not playing outside as much. We're getting youngsters who know how to surf but can't swim very well. On the other hand, we're seeing an evolution in performance, whether

WORDS: DAVID MORTON. PHOTOGRAPHY: JENNIFER CAWLEY; COURTESY OF BREMONT



BREMONT
SUPERMARINE
WATERMAN
LONDON

BREMONT WATERMAN APEX, £4,795

> 'Laird is the ultimate innovator and a true Waterman. To have the opportunity to work with him has been a dream come true. And for him to become a Bremont ambassador, wearing our most high-performance diving watch, is just the icing on the cake.'
> *Nick English, Bremont co-founder*

that's due to equipment or the training and being more conscious of fitness.

The media has changed, too. We used to do it and then get filmed, so any footage of us surfing was crazy. It was special. Even a still photograph. But now every kid has a GoPro. Now every set of every day is published.

MH: With everyone always being 'on' and connected, do you feel a sense of escape when you paddle out?

LH: Yeah, it works very well. I've surfed in front of thousands of people, but I get as much fulfilment from achieving things when people aren't watching. Probably more. I've worked at that – separating feelings of accomplishment from the audience. We're in a world now where we need other people to tell us if we're successful. We're giving up our sense of fulfilment to the masses, and that's why a lot of people are unhappy. I can go out surfing and have a great session alone, or with one or two others for a bit of natural camaraderie. That way you control your destiny.

MH: You've said before that surfing has saved you from going down a destructive path. How so?

LH: The ocean is a teacher. It's the most conductive substance on earth. It's alive. It takes bad energy out and gives you good energy. It's cognitive; there is a memory to it. You can't help but be humbled by it. You can give it all the aggression you've got and it will just absorb it like it's nothing. It's consistent and reliable. There are things about the ocean we need that we just don't get on land. Life came from the sea.

The ocean has been my university and my church, my hospital and therapy. It cures your spirit.

MH: Finally, you haven't followed the same route as the majority of sporting legends. You've often shunned the tours and the leagues for big feats and firsts. Is being a pathfinder your personal mission?

LH: It's amazing. I could have never imagined the route I've taken. As a young charger, I had a belief that I wanted to have an impact. I didn't know what that was going to look like; I just wanted to be free. I was raised in a wild environment and my mum, an amazing woman, gave us freedom. Incredible freedom. I watched my stepdad surfing in contest and his fate being decided upon by a group of judges. I knew I never wanted to subject myself to that.

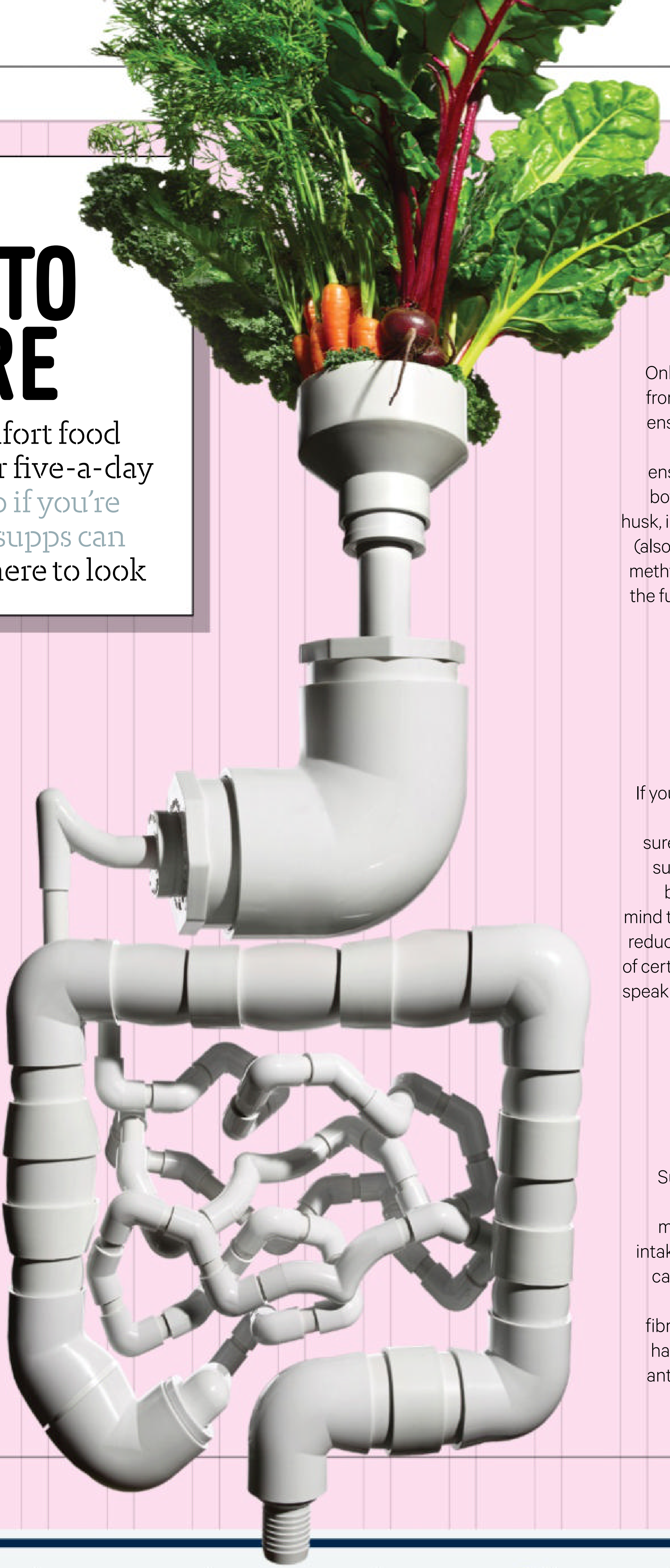
For me, it's art. It's an expression of me. The innovations have been invaluable. I started doing stand-up paddleboarding by myself in Hawaii and was the only one doing it for seven or eight years. Now it's happening around the whole world. There are guys riding the biggest waves ever using the techniques that we came up with. Those are my trophies. When I'm in a hole with a stone above my head, it's not the contest I've won that counts. It's the impact I've had and will continue to have long after I'm gone. For that young rapscallion who wanted to make a difference, that's all that matters.

Laird Hamilton is a brand ambassador for British watch brand Bremont

SUPPLEMENT CHECK

JUMP INTO THE FIBRE

When the winter comfort food is calling, scoring your five-a-day isn't always a given. So if you're falling short on fibre, supps can help – if you know where to look



START

01
THE CLAIM

In the UK, the average fibre intake for adults is 18g, roughly 60% of what it should be. So why not boost your intake with pills or powders? As the products advertise, fibre can balance cholesterol and blood glucose while helping to smooth your digestion.

02
WHAT'S ACTUALLY TRUE

Research has shown that taking fibre supplements can improve your blood glucose, cholesterol, heart health and, okay, yes, the regularity of your bowel movements.

03
THAT SAID…

Supplements should never make up the majority of your fibre intake. No fibre product can replace the many benefits of eating fibre-rich foods, which have disease-fighting antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals – and taste better, too.

04
SHOULD YOU TAKE ONE?

If you can't hit your fibre goals through food, sure. Start with half the suggested dose, then build up. But keep in mind that fibre supps can reduce the effectiveness of certain medications, so speak to your doctor first.

05
WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Only buy supplements from trusted brands to ensure you know what you're getting. And ensure there's a mix of both soluble (psyllium husk, inulin) and insoluble (also psyllium husk, plus methylcellulose) fibre for the full range of benefits.

FINISH

FOUR SURPRISING SOURCES OF FIBRE

01/ HUMMUS
2 tbsp = 2g

02/ ALMONDS
2 small handfuls = 7g

03/ AVOCADO
½ = 7g

04/ ARTICHOKES
5 cooked hearts = 5g

THE MH DIARY

NO REST FOR THE WEEKEND

Training just for the fun of it is great – but sometimes you need a goal. Make a strong start to your year with our pick of this season's best mettle-testing events

THE SWIMMER, LONDON

14 JAN, 11 FEB, 11 MAR

If you're already hardy enough to brave winter swimming, why not up the challenge? This informal half marathon takes place in London – with a chilly twist. Participants run from north to south, dipping into Hampstead Heath Ponds, the Serpentine and Brockwell Lido along the way, before a very well-earned team breakfast. You'll appreciate that bacon butty. *abovebelow.sc*

RED BULL'S FLYING LAPS, ANYWHERE

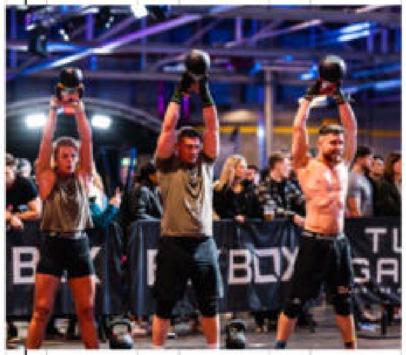
6 FEB – 31 MAR

Complete this six-week quest in your own time. Strava users are invited to see how many laps of Silverstone's 5.9km track they can tick off before the F1 season starts. Run, cycle or move in any way you can. (A full 52-lap race is 306.3km, FYI.) Participants are in with a chance to join Oracle Red Bull Racing at the big event in July. *redbull.com*

THE CROSSFIT OPEN, WORLDWIDE

16 FEB – 6 MAR

Open to all abilities, the early qualifying stages of the CrossFit Games allow box-goers worldwide to assess their effort against their peers. There are five workouts to complete over five weeks. Your efforts will need to be assessed by a coach in order to get a spot on the leaderboard. *open.crossfit.com*



THE TURF GAMES WINTER FESTIVAL, FARNBOROUGH

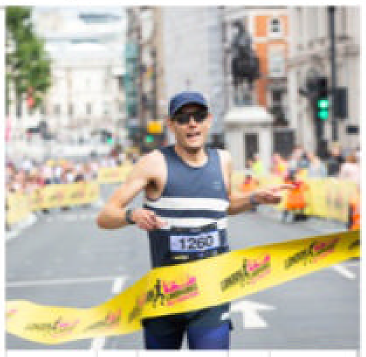
18 – 19 FEB

Athletes compete in teams of six across three divisions – elite, intermediate and everyday athlete. Solo trainers can enter and be allocated a team. If you're unsure which division is right for you, check the website. Can you swing a 32kg KB and climb a rope? You're elite. Just about comfy with a 20kg dumbbell? That's cool, too. *turfgames.com*

SPORTS DAZE, MANCHESTER

22 APR

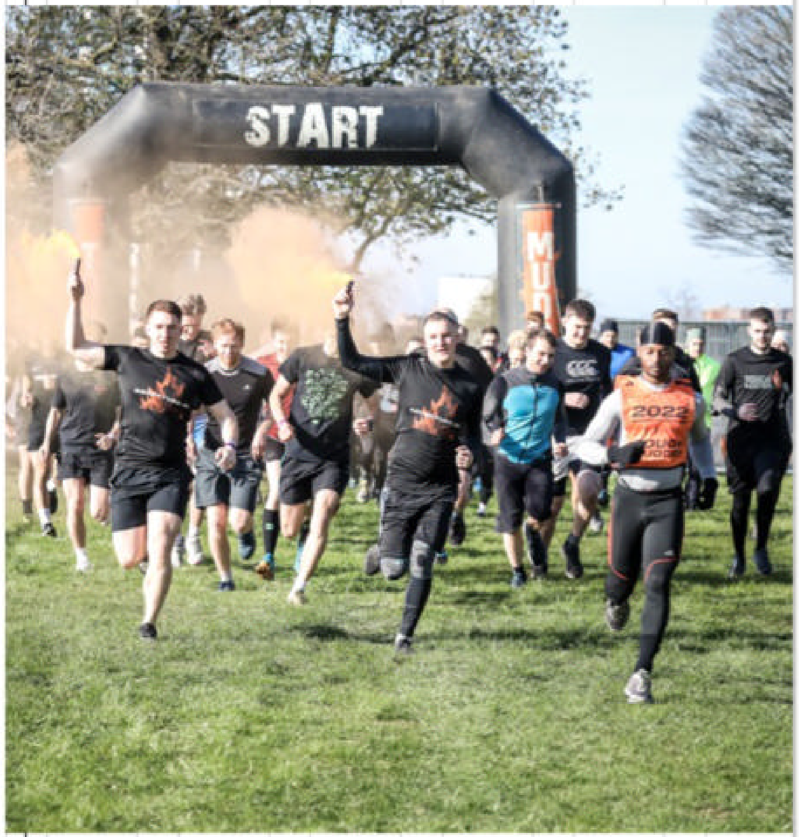
Inspired by the nostalgia of school sports days – but given a functional fitness twist – this new-to-the-scene retro fitness comp is worth adding to your calendar. It's open to beginners, but still demands a degree of strength, skill and teamwork, billing itself as 'CrossFit meets athletics'. Attendees compete in mixed teams of three men and three women. Expect barbells, sandbags – and lots of neon activewear. *sports-daze.com*



LONDON LANDMARKS HALF MARATHON, CENTRAL LONDON

2 APR

Whether you live and work in the capital city or fancy a weekend of domestic tourism, there is no better way to explore London than on foot. Starting at Nelson's Column and weaving past St Paul's Cathedral and the financial district's iconic skycrapers, before finishing up at Downing Street via Westminster, you'll tick off plenty of postcard-worthy sites over 13 miles. *llhm.co.uk*



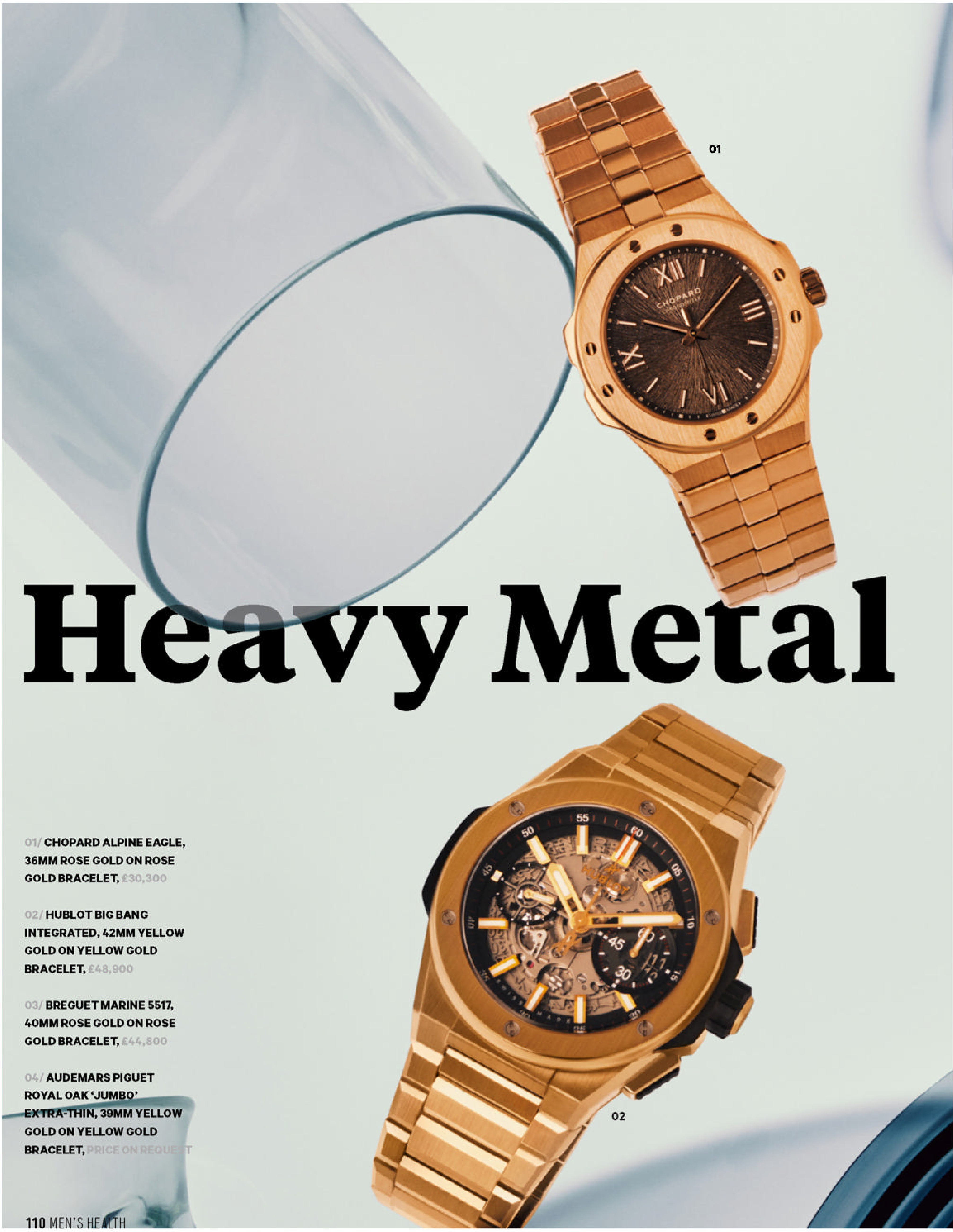
TOUGH MUDDER, FINSBURY PARK, LONDON

15 – 16 APR

The first event of the 2023 calendar takes place in north London. Pick from a 5K or 10K obstacle course (or a rather less gruelling one-miler for kids). Military assault course-inspired obstacles include ice baths, monkey bars, minor electric shocks and – as the name suggests – lots of mud. Don't fancy sliding through muddy water below a steel wire fence with just a few inches to breathe? This one's probably not for you... *toughmudder.co.uk*

WORDS: SCARLETT WRENCH; DEZI ABEYTA. PHOTOGRAPHY: ADAM VOORHES/GALLERY STOCK. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL HEDGE; DAN MATTHEWS; STUDIO 33; LUCKY IF SHARP

Heavy Metal

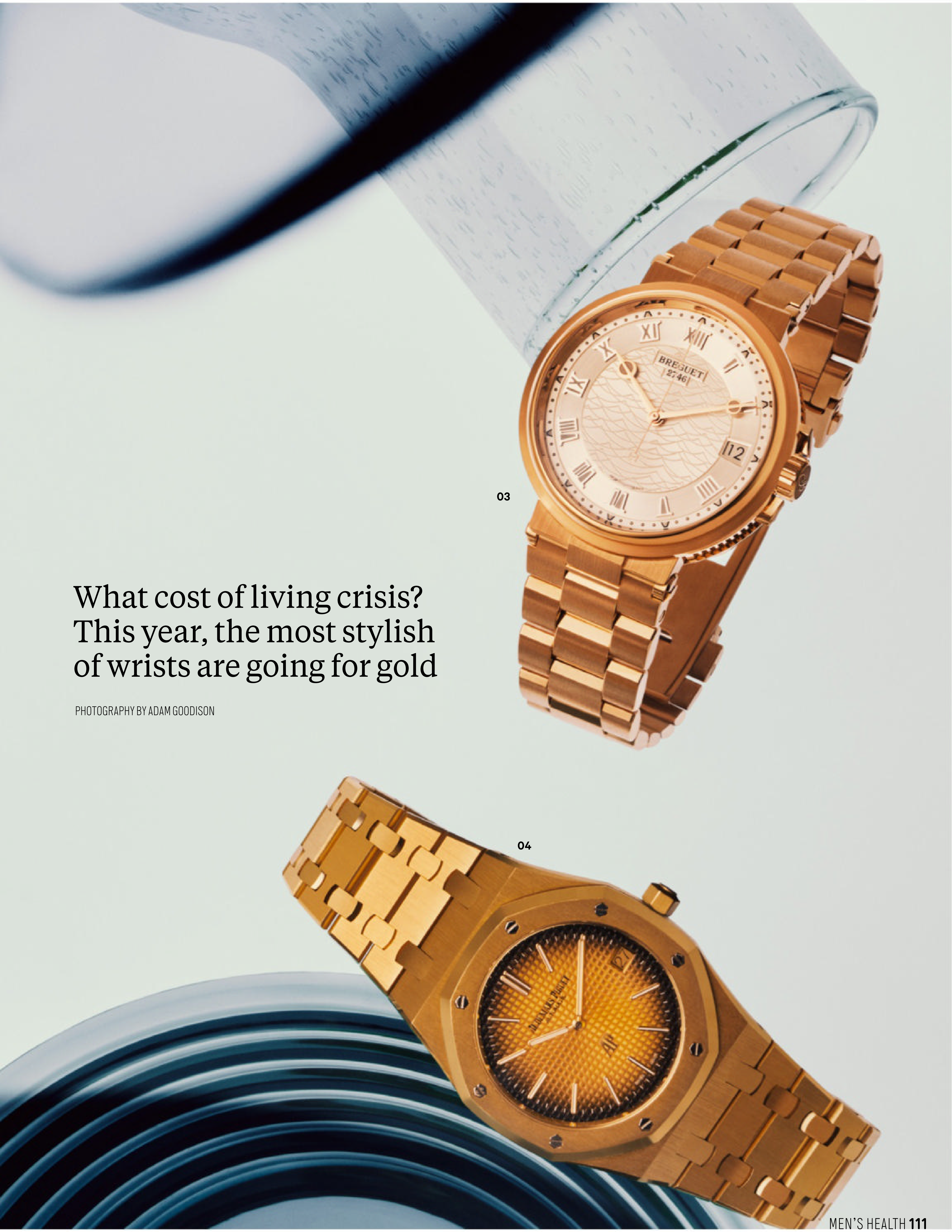


01/ **CHOPARD ALPINE EAGLE, 36MM ROSE GOLD ON ROSE GOLD BRACELET,** £30,300

02/ **HUBLOT BIG BANG INTEGRATED, 42MM YELLOW GOLD ON YELLOW GOLD BRACELET,** £48,900

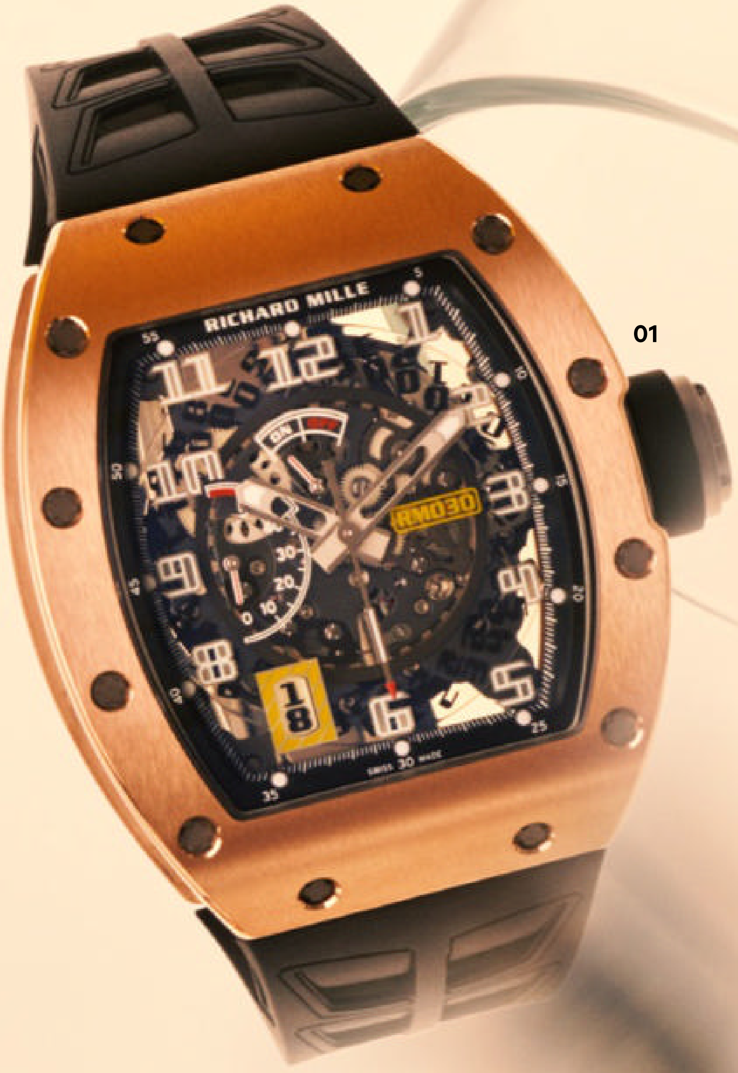
03/ **BREGUET MARINE 5517, 40MM ROSE GOLD ON ROSE GOLD BRACELET,** £44,800

04/ **AUDEMARS PIGUET ROYAL OAK ‘JUMBO’ EXTRA-THIN, 39MM YELLOW GOLD ON YELLOW GOLD BRACELET,** PRICE ON REQUEST



What cost of living crisis? This year, the most stylish of wrists are going for gold

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM GOODISON



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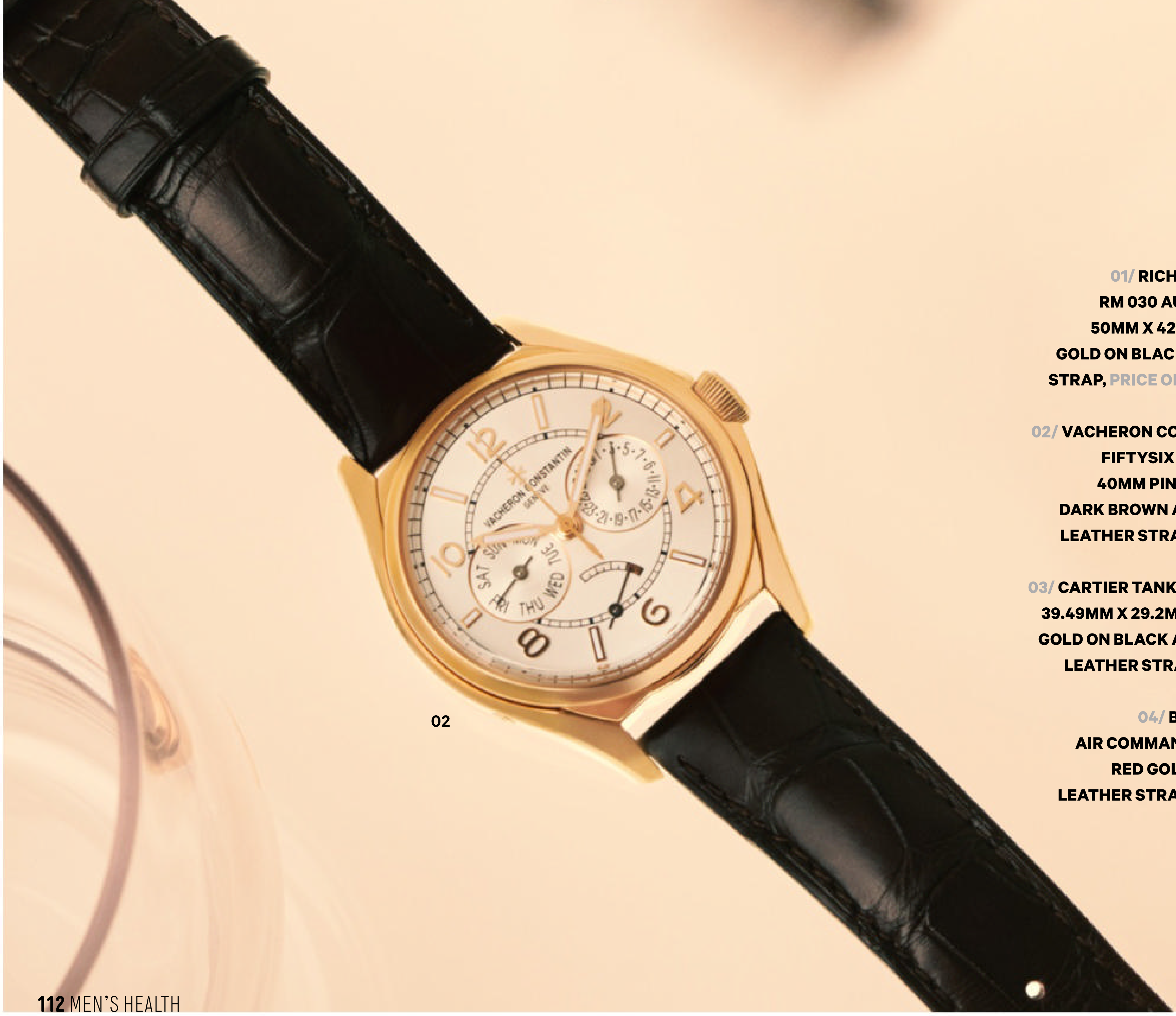


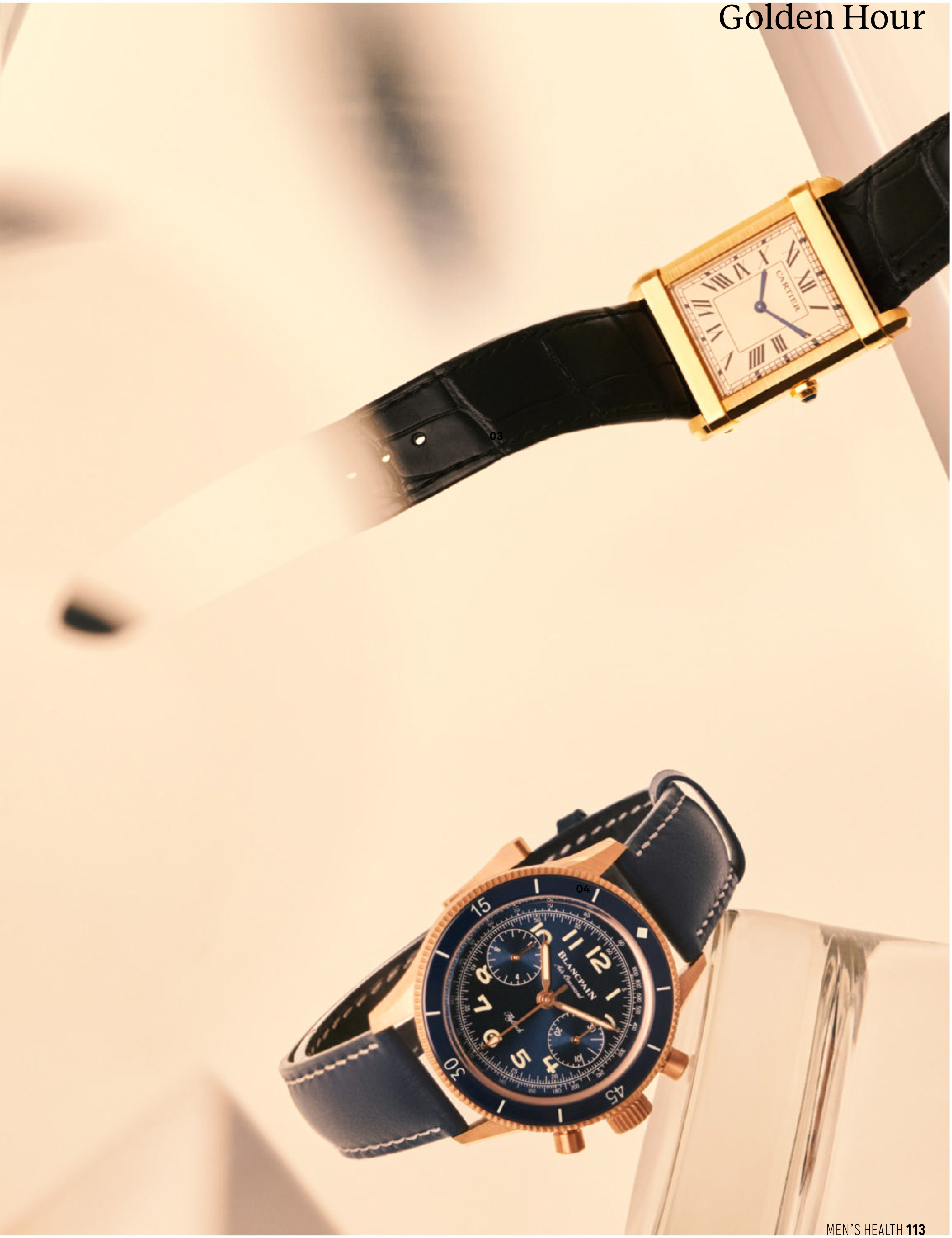
02

01/ **RICHARD MILLE RM 030 AUTOMATIC, 50MM X 42.70MM RED GOLD ON BLACK LEATHER STRAP,** PRICE ON REQUEST

02/ **VACHERON CONSTANTIN FIFTYSIX DAY-DATE, 40MM PINK GOLD ON DARK BROWN ALLIGATOR LEATHER STRAP,** £39,000

03/ **CARTIER TANK CHINOISE, 39.49MM X 29.2MM YELLOW GOLD ON BLACK ALLIGATOR LEATHER STRAP,** £26,100

04/ **BLANCPAIN AIR COMMAND, 36.2MM RED GOLD ON BLUE LEATHER STRAP,** £25,800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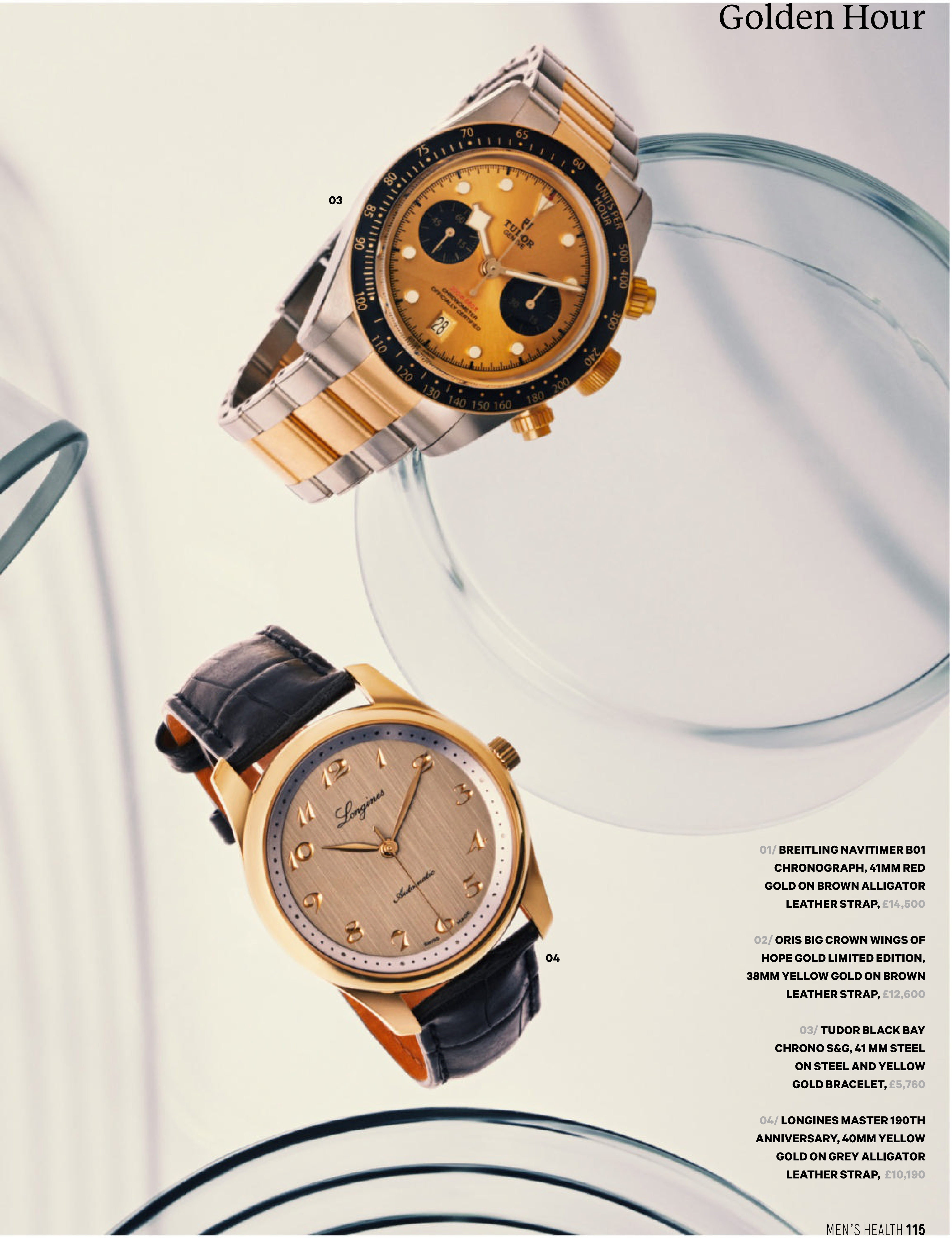
CARTIER
04
BLANCPAIN

01
02
BREITLING
NAVITIMER
ORIS
BIG CROWN
5 DAYS

Golden Hour

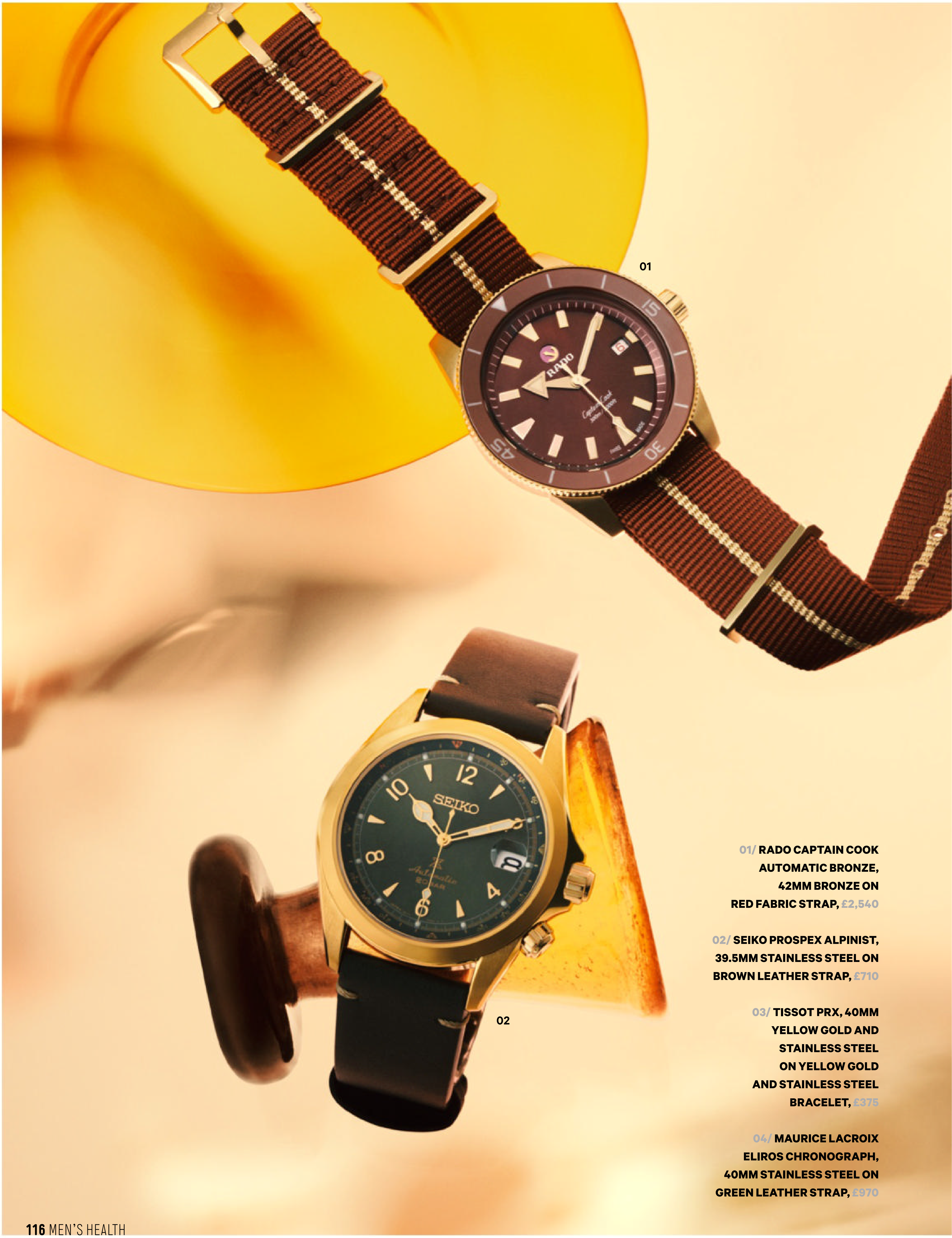


01/ **BREITLING NAVITIMER B01 CHRONOGRAPH, 41MM RED GOLD ON BROWN ALLIGATOR LEATHER STRAP,** £14,500

02/ **ORIS BIG CROWN WINGS OF HOPE GOLD LIMITED EDITION, 38MM YELLOW GOLD ON BROWN LEATHER STRAP,** £12,600

03/ **TUDOR BLACK BAY CHRONO S&G, 41 MM STEEL ON STEEL AND YELLOW GOLD BRACELET,** £5,760

04/ **LONGINES MASTER 190TH ANNIVERSARY, 40MM YELLOW GOLD ON GREY ALLIGATOR LEATHER STRAP,** £10,190



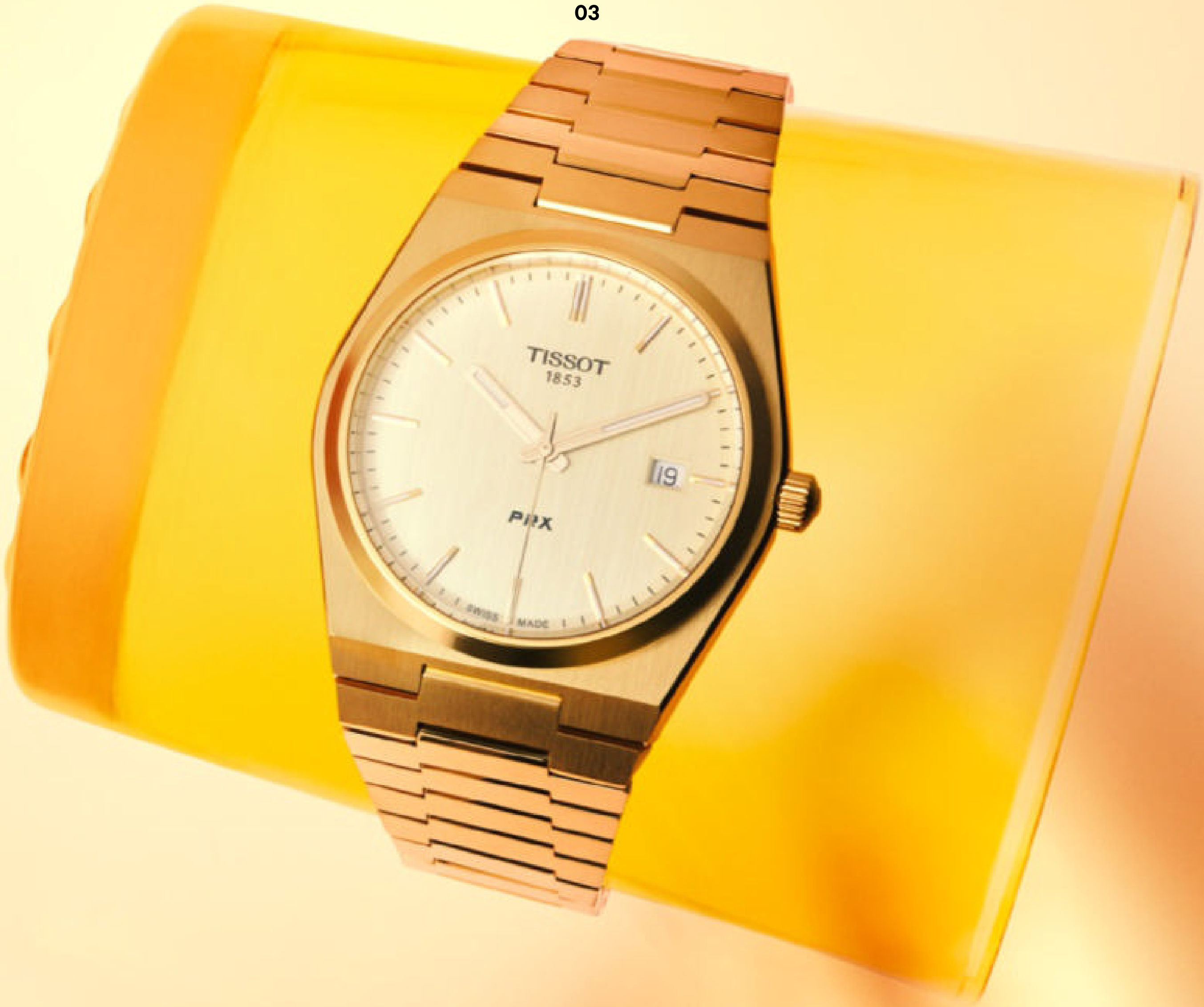
01/ RADO CAPTAIN COOK AUTOMATIC BRONZE, 42MM BRONZE ON RED FABRIC STRAP, £2,540

02/ SEIKO PROSPEX ALPINIST, 39.5MM STAINLESS STEEL ON BROWN LEATHER STRAP, £710

03/ TISSOT PRX, 40MM YELLOW GOLD AND STAINLESS STEEL ON YELLOW GOLD AND STAINLESS STEEL BRACELET, £375

04/ MAURICE LACROIX ELIROS CHRONOGRAPH, 40MM STAINLESS STEEL ON GREEN LEATHER STRAP, £970

03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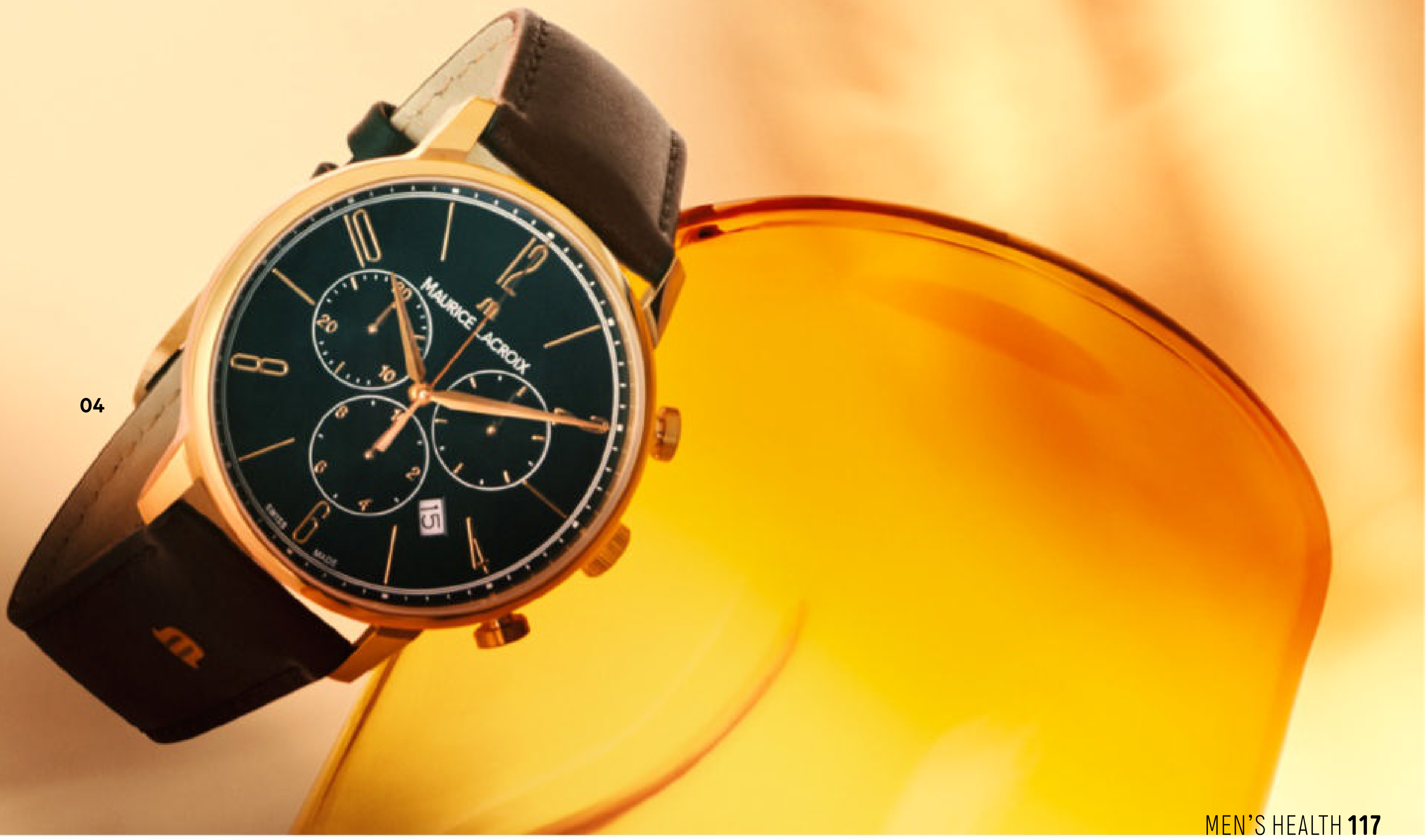
1853
PRX
19
SWISS MADE

04


MAURICE LACROIX
15
SWISS MADE

01

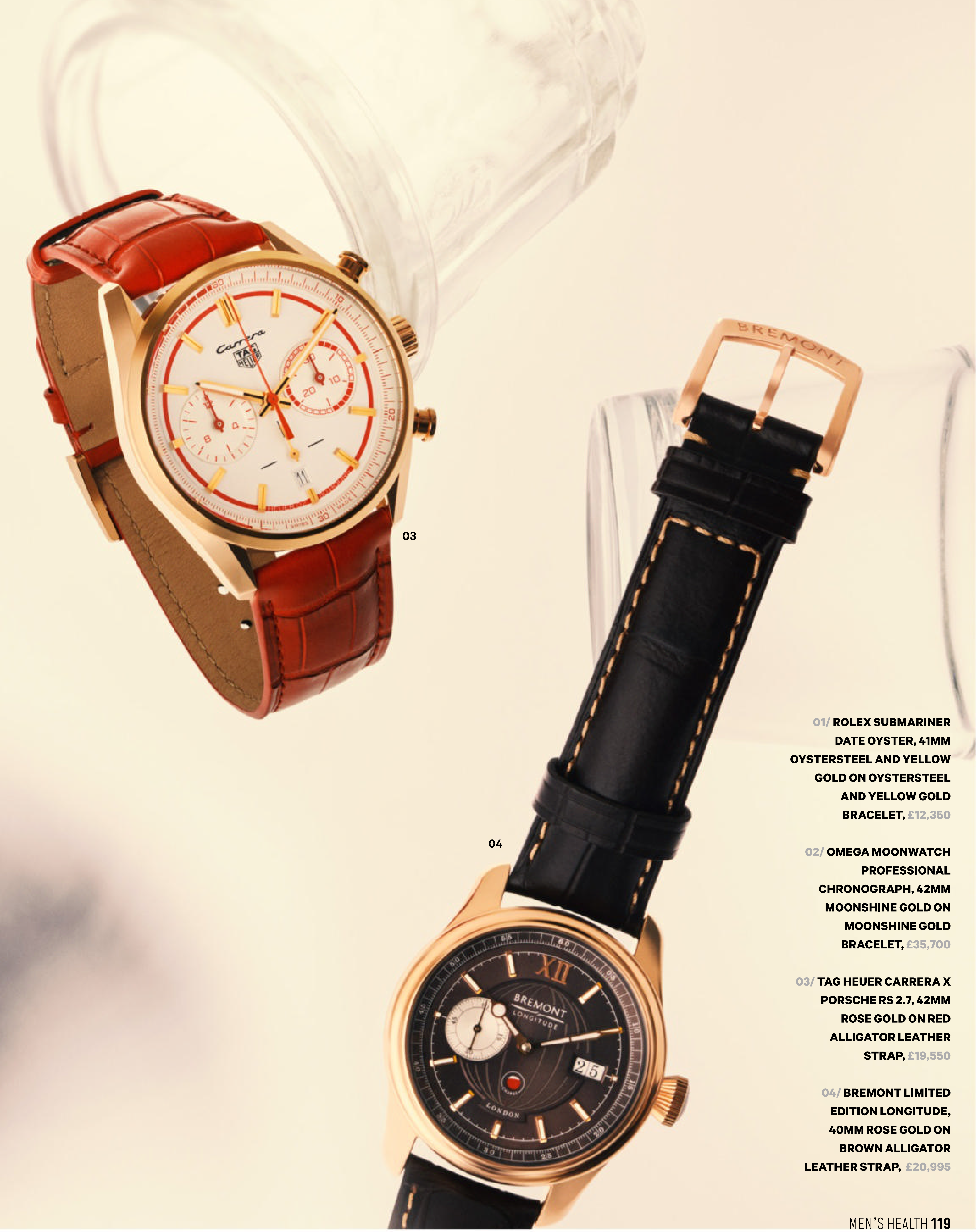
ROLEX
OYSTER PERPETUAL DATE
SUBMARINER
1000ft = 300m
SUPERLATIVE CHRONOMETER
OFFICIALLY CERTIFIED
28
10
20
30
40
50

OMEGA
Speedmaster
PROFESSIONAL
TACHYMÈTRE

02

SET DESIGNER: MARIAM SONEKAN. RETOUCHER: DAVID WOOD

Golden Hour


03
Carrera
TAG Heuer
04
BREMONT
BREMONT
LONGITUDE
LONDON

01/ **ROLEX SUBMARINER DATE OYSTER, 41MM OYSTERSTEEL AND YELLOW GOLD ON OYSTERSTEEL AND YELLOW GOLD BRACELET,** £12,350

02/ **OMEGA MOONWATCH PROFESSIONAL CHRONOGRAPH, 42MM MOONSHINE GOLD ON MOONSHINE GOLD BRACELET,** £35,700

03/ **TAG HEUER CARRERA X PORSCHE RS 2.7, 42MM ROSE GOLD ON RED ALLIGATOR LEATHER STRAP,** £19,550

04/ **BREMONT LIMITED EDITION LONGITUDE, 40MM ROSE GOLD ON BROWN ALLIGATOR LEATHER STRAP,** £20,995

The Adventurist

Men'sHealth

ONE IMPOSSIBLE CHALLENGE. NO WAY TO TRAIN. GO

WORDS BY ANDREW TRACEY

A Quiet Place

How do you challenge the man who's up for anything? You task him to do nothing. *MH*'s fitness editor signed up for a 10-day silent Buddhist retreat. It turned out to be the most gruelling endurance event he's ever attempted

OUR FITNESS EDITOR SWAPS EMOMS FOR OMMS

PHOTOGRAPHY: CALLUM TRACEY. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: LUCKY IF SHARP; LOUISA PARRY

For my first outing as *Men's Health*'s Adventurist, I was tasked with tackling an ultra-distance duathlon. The country was in the grips of its first pandemic lockdown at the time, so I had to rack up the obscene kilometre count using a stationary bike coupled with 200m laps around the house. I'm not waxing lyrical when I say it was dizzying.

In my own spare time, I've also completed ultramarathons, DIY triathlons and a 10K walk holding the equivalent weight of my own body in each hand. I've climbed 10 mountains in a weekend and have carried a squat rack to the top of the highest point in England and, more wearily, down again.

My life is a story of movement; even my work has seen me travel around the country, rarely spending more than a few nights in the same bed. At this point, another physical challenge scarcely seems like an adventure. My comfort zone is physical discomfort.

What does make me uncomfortable, however, is stopping. And so I signed up for one of the most daunting adventures of my life: sitting in silence for 10 days, devoid of the distractions of the outside world, and simply being. In our culture of constant stimuli, instant gratification and dopamine on tap, I wanted to know what a man of perpetual motion could learn from imposed stillness.

THE SILENT TREATMENT

This isn't my first draft of this article. It's not even the 10th. I probably went through at least three versions before I'd left for home on the final day of the retreat. During 10 days of meditation, you have a lot of time to think.

I had little idea what to expect as I pulled off a country lane an hour or so from the M4 and crawled along the long gravel driveway. I knew the retreat had its roots in a practice established hundreds of years ago, which itself could trace its lineage back to the Theravadan tradition – and the OG Buddha himself – some 2,500 years ago. But I also knew I was in the English countryside – not the place you'd expect to find an archetypal Buddhist temple.

As I rounded the final corner, I was confronted with a large country house, flanked by rows of small outhouses set in a quaint country garden. There, in the centre of the green, was a gold-domed 'temple', which looked as though it had been airdropped directly from India.

The 10-day experience I'd signed up for is designed to teach laypeople – those unable to devote themselves to a monastic life – the principles of vipassana meditation (literal translation: 'super-seeing'), better understood as 'mindfulness' in the west. Undistracted by the demands of the outside world, the hope is that students come away with fundamental insights into their minds, as well as a solid meditation practice that they can integrate into their lives.

> 'The goal is to understand life as a series of sensations that come and go'

The daily schedule was deceptively simple. After handing in our phones, we were shown to our shared accommodation, where we had a brief chance to become acquainted with our roommates for the next week. Within an hour or two of arriving, a loud ceremonial bell rang to signify the beginning of the Noble Silence; we were to refrain from speaking unless directly addressed by the head of the course, which occurred during brief, minutes-long daily 'interviews'.

The same bell would be rung at 4am each morning – our wake-up call. Each day began with a few hours of meditation in the Dharma hall, a wooden-floored room filled with mats, facing a raised platform from which our teacher would deliver instructions or talk about Buddhist philosophy. After breakfast, we would return to the hall for two to three more hours of meditation, then stop for lunch and a short break, during which students could silently wander the grounds. This process would repeat before an early evening meal and a final few hours of discourse and meditation ahead of a 9pm bedtime.

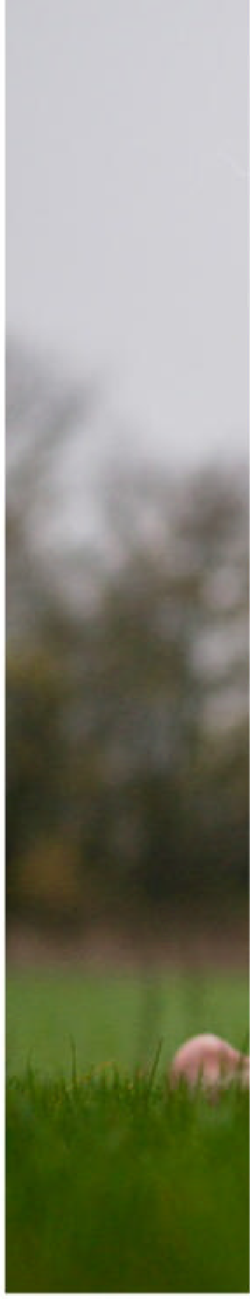
FOLLOW YOUR BREATH

The practices themselves were simple, but certainly not easy. We began with three days of 'anapana' or 'mindfulness of the breath', one of the oldest and most fundamental teachings. The idea here is to place every bit of your attention on the act of breathing. The emphasis is on the sensations at the tip of your nose as you inhale and exhale. Nothing more, nothing less. We were told that we could make a light mental note of 'in' and 'out' as a sort of crutch, but any other thought or feeling was to be overcome.

Just do the maths with me here: that's a potential 21 hours spent trying to keep your focus solely on one very specific sensation. Not only was this an unprecedented period of continuous practice, even for a regular meditator, but my usual object of attention up until this point was the feeling of the breath in my torso – a subtle but noticeable difference. I felt as though I'd rocked up to a handwriting competition, just to be told it was left-handed only. After the

ARNOLD IS
NUMERO UNO

REFLECT INWARDS TO ALTER YOUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE



first day, I applied Vicks to the tip of my nose to make the sensation more palpable. Luckily there's no testing for doping in mindfulness retreats.

After three days of shepherding my focus to the edges of my nostrils, we moved on to the real meat and potatoes of the vipassana practice. Here, the aim was to take the extreme levels of focus that we had cultivated and open up our awareness to every sensation that might occur in the body. The main goal was to respond with neutrality to each experience. To notice a 'weird feeling in your leg' is too much detail; the idea is not to focus on any physical location, nor assign judgement to the feeling beyond noticing its presence and that it passes. The end goal is to develop a real, embodied insight into how all of life is simply a sensation that comes and goes. Ultimately, the aim is to see that any sense we have of 'a self' separate from our experiences is an illusion. (A heavy concept, I know.)

EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE

I'm tempted here to tell a Huxley-esque psychedelic story about the experiences that I had during my 30-plus hours of sitting. There were undoubtedly many such moments. On the third day, after hours of concentration, I attempted the wild-card manoeuvre of using a Tibetan Buddhism technique where you 'turn attention back on itself' and try to 'look for who's looking'. I shook uncontrollably and was left floating in an experience that I can only describe as two mirrors facing one another, reflecting everything that is. Cool story, right?

More than once, I developed a sense of samadhi, a deep meditative consciousness in which I experienced an uncentred connectedness with the entire world. Experiences such as these are nearly impossible to write about; they simply must be felt.

In one such state I was reduced to tears by the intense, indescribable experience of eating baba ganoush. I then dared myself to try a mouthful of butterscotch mousse (a favourite dessert), after which the entire universe collapsed in on itself until there was nothing but the raw sensation on my tongue. Butterscotch stretching into infinity. The notes in my diary from that particular evening read, 'It's as if I'd never eaten a single thing before in my life. Every meal could be this way. There's an entire book in this.'

I'm truncating these experiences because they're not wholly indicative of my full 10 days. On paper, a vipassana retreat has all the hallmarks of a holiday camp, albeit with a Buddhist twist. The reality, however, was no week at Butlins.

As a meditator for nearly a decade, and someone who has taken his practice very seriously, I went into this with the agenda of writing an article extolling the virtues of meditation to an audience who are more familiar with my musings on biceps curls and squats. But, for the majority of the time I spent outside the meditation hall, I felt a deep sense of anguish. On my mat, I was investigating the possibility that life is nothing but a series of responses to stimuli. That our individual conditioned responses are all that make us 'us'; that the self is not as real as we think it is.

Off the mat, however, I was greeted with a loud, orchestral rendition of 'Everything You Fundamentally Fear, Desire And Regret', and other such hits. After each sit, my sense of self was reasserting itself with a vengeful fury. Years of training to 'see thoughts as

MINDFUL MOVEMENT IS GOOD FOR MORE THAN JUST MUSCLE

thoughts' and let them pass paled into insignificance in the face of my wrathful inner monologue. I was having a very bad trip. On such occasions, in an attempt to ease my suffering, I paced around a closed-off corner of the garden and, in floods of tears, confessed my sincerest apologies for any wrongs I'd ever done to imaginary avatars of the people closest to me.

Over the course of these episodes, I came to a sober realisation: I have no idea how to just *be*. At all times in my life, I'm doing. Even during passive acts such as sitting on the sofa, the television is on and I'm scrolling through social media, or otherwise communicating with an other person. I can barely walk a few metres without pulling my phone out of my jeans and checking Instagram. (I noticed early on in the retreat that each time I left a room, my hand would reflexively search my pocket.)

I was learning in real time how all the distractions of daily life that I had been perpetually plugged into were acting as a technicolour morphine drip. In lieu of anything to consume, and with the door to the inner workings of my mind blown wide open, I was feeling everything that I had been numbing, all at once.

Philosopher Blaise Pascal quipped that, 'All men's miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone.' I wholeheartedly agree, and my meditation practice has long been my active rebuttal. But now I was seeing that I wasn't properly integrating what I was learning into my life. Not even close.

> 'I investigated the possibility that the self is not as real as we think it is'

TAKE WHAT YOU NEED

All of which is to say that Buddhist retreats are not necessarily for everyone. One of my roommates shared that he'd recently split up with his long-term girlfriend and that, just the day before, he'd given himself the choice between embarking on 10 days of silence or heading to what he conceded would have been a 'messy' festival. I'm taken with the narrative that he chose self-improvement over self-destruction, but I'm not sure that 10 days of intense, inward reflection is the right environment for anyone who has experienced recent trauma. Things may come up that require the compassionate voice of a trusted friend, or even a professional. I know life-long zen practitioners who are happy to say that, at least for beginners, meditation is no substitution for therapy.

I wanted to finish this piece by imploring that each of us turn the lamp of attention inwards for a period of quiet reflection each day. And I'll still rally behind that. But I'd also like to offer the less esoteric, more practical advice of 'paying attention to what you're paying attention to'. I want to suggest that we all build in deliberate periods of time where we're undistracted by external goings on. Perhaps a 'social media sabbath', where we avoid doomscrolling for 24 hours. Perhaps full abstinence, as often as you can muster it – including books, podcasts, perhaps even conversation. Even if we don't deliberately engineer these occasions, I'd like to posit that we should be on guard against reaching for a distraction the second we're alone with the contents of our consciousness.

As my time on retreat wound to a close, somewhere between packing my bags and making my way back to the car, I brokered a deal with myself to at least make it to the motorway before I switched my phone on.

If we can let the dust settle more often and see what's really here – even if it's initially painful – we can begin to live more deliberately. I'm *almost* tempted to quote *The Matrix* here, but I hope that by this point you're already buying what I'm selling.

Yes, meditate every day – but more importantly, stop curating the soundtrack to your life. Start living it.

OUR WRITER CONFRONTS HIS TECH ATTACHMENT

THE MH DIRECTORY

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COMPEX
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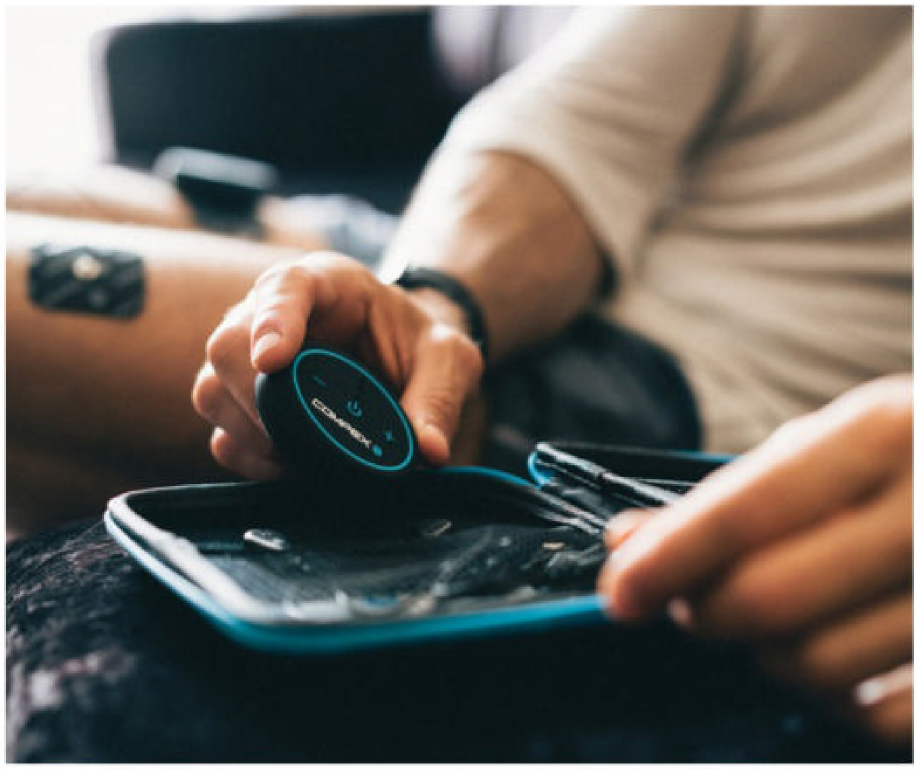

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BEAT JOINT DISCOMFORT THIS WINTER WITH TURMERIC+

Damp days and freezing temperatures don't just take a toll on our mood; many of us will feel the effects of the season in our bones and joints.

The NHS reports around 10 million people in the UK have a condition that affects their joints, most commonly in the knees, hands, wrists, shoulders, feet and back.

From genes to diet to lifestyle and even the weather, the influences on our musculoskeletal health are as complex and interconnected as our bones, muscles and joints – but nutrition is always essential.

A diet rich in fruits, dark leafy vegetables and oily fish brings helpful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. A growing number of people are also turning to turmeric-based products and nutritional supplements for support.

Not all turmeric supplements are created equal. Many focus on one key active ingredient called curcumin but it's difficult for our bodies to absorb, and unless it's made 'bioavailable', it can pass through the gut unused.

To overcome these challenges, scientists at innovative supplements developer FutureYou Cambridge formulated a unique supplement called Turmeric+, featuring a unique, patented formulation called Meriva® that makes curcumin 30 times more absorbable than standard turmeric powder.

This is also combined with vitamins C and D which contribute to normal function of cartilage and normal muscle function.*

'Our advanced formulation works by mimicking the way the body naturally absorbs curcuminoids after eating turmeric cooked with fat,' explains Dr Miriam Ferrer PhD, Head of Product Development.

'But it delivers far more than you'd normally get from a meal.'

It's become the world's most scientifically researched bioavailable curcumin formulation, featured in 45 human studies involving over 2,000 people and been recognised and certified by Informed-Sport for use by athletes.

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Food supplement
28 vegan tablets

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Marcus explains: "My coach suggested taking a turmeric supplement, so I went online to research my options.
The fact Turmeric+ is Informed Sport* certified is crucial to me. I also liked the company's scientific credentials, so I decided to give Turmeric+ a try.

"I've been taking it for around 3 months and I'm very impressed, in fact I have it on subscription now. I certainly feel much more like my old self and feel fitter than ever."

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FutureYou Cambridge are offering you the chance to try Turmeric+ for free with their 28 day subscription trial. To claim your free subscription trial pack worth £19 all you have to do is visit **FutureYouOffers.co.uk** or freephone **0800 808 5740** and quote the code **TF220** at checkout.

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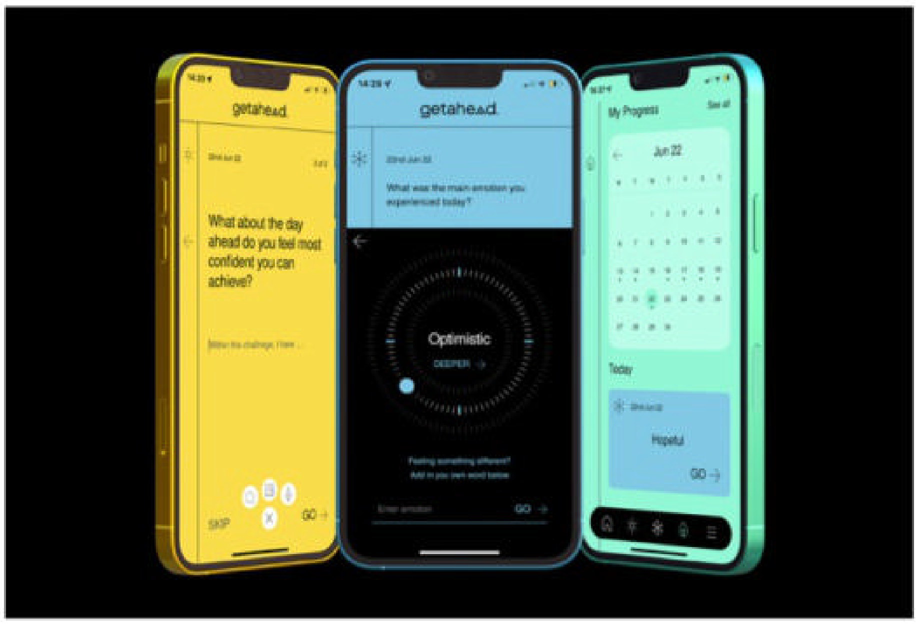
getahead
What about the day ahead do you feel most confident you can achieve?
SKIP
GO
getahead
What was the main emotion you experienced today?
Optimistic
DEEPER
GO
My Progress
Jun 22
Today
Hopeful
GO

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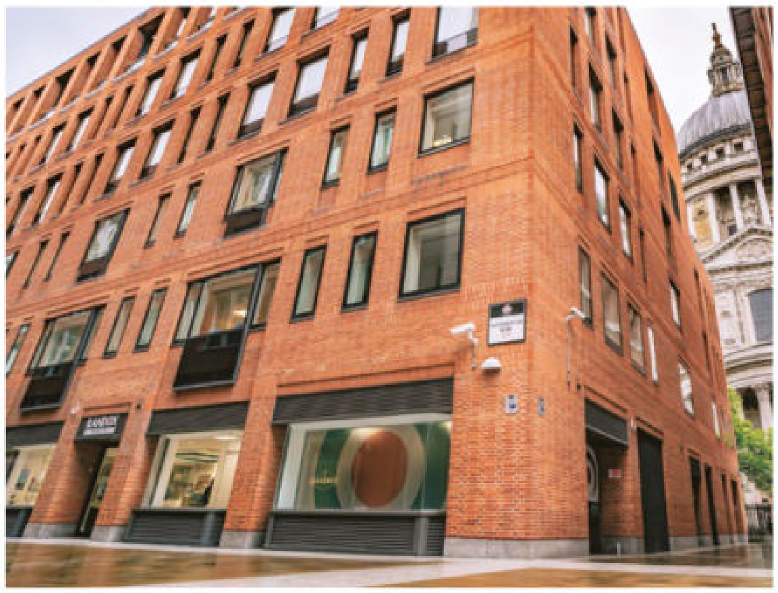
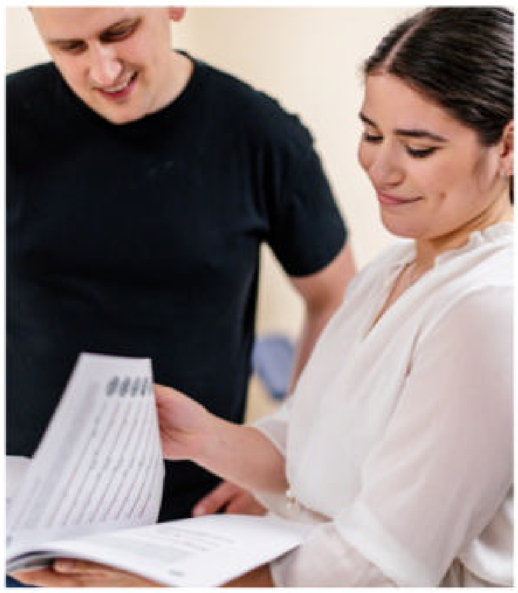
THE POWER TO
EXTEND YOUR LIFE.





RANDOX
HEALTH

THE POWER TO EXTEND YOUR LIFE.

With so much to enjoy in life, protecting your future health is crucial. But keeping track of your health isn't always easy to do. Faced with time pressures across our work and social lives, it can become all too easy to let our health slide.

At Randox Health each of our personalised, private health packages aim to povide you with real-time insights on your current health and future health risks.

We screen for hundreds of sensitive disease markers to identify early signs of illness in many cases before symptoms arise, empowering you to make positive lifestyle changes to help prevent or delay illness.

David Ferguson, Chief Operating Officer said
"Over the past few years, we've seen a dramatic change in people's behaviours as they seek to understand their health and well-being better. At Randox Health, we provide a range of specialised health packages that enable you to take control of your health by promoting preventative healthcare."

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Regular review of your health is key to understanding and maintaining good health and wellbeing. With a new year signalling a fresh start, there has never been a better time to take control of your health.

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THE GYM KITCHEN

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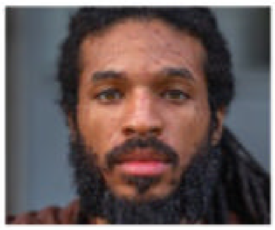

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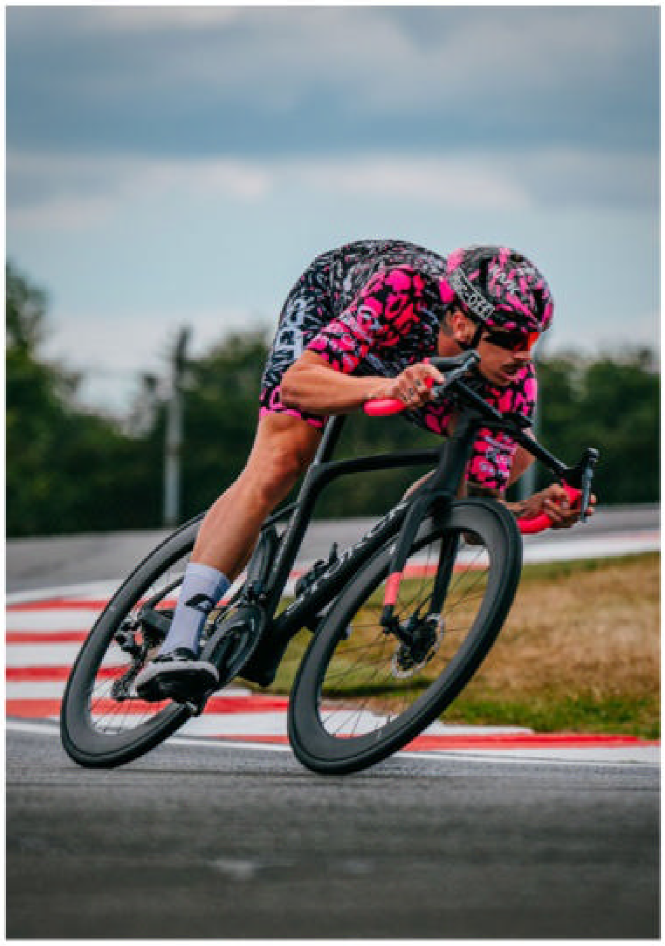
* average diet based on 3 meals a day of porridge, rice and chicken, stew with vegetables.



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ONE WORD ANSWER #34

QUESTION

What instrument of creativity could fend off genuine heartache?

ANSWER

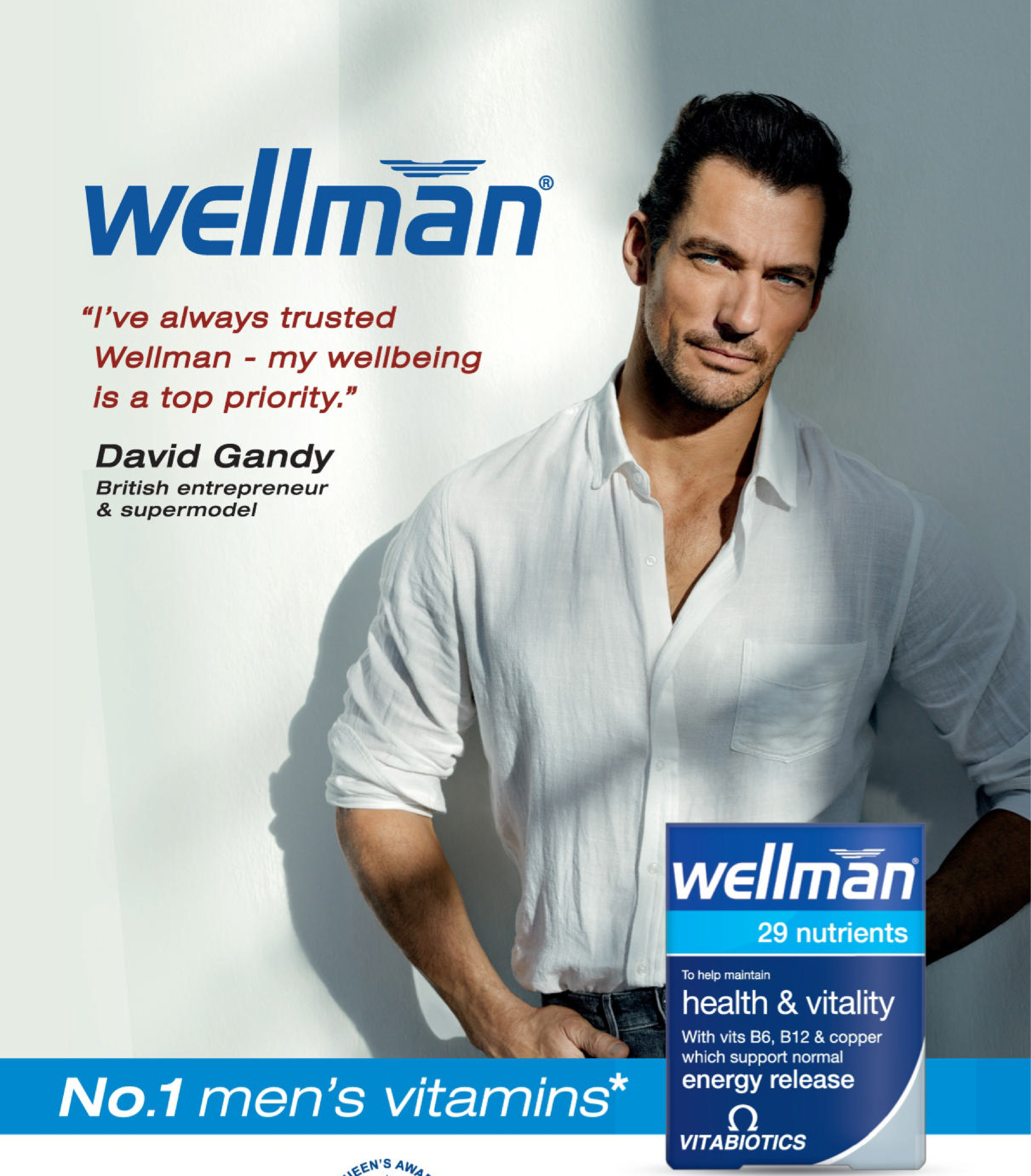
Guitar

That a great song can be a tonic for any emotional trial is no secret. Whether disappearing into a favourite album after a difficult day or queuing your power track for the gruelling final mile of your first half-marathon, music is a proven psychological prop. Go one step further, however, by pausing Spotify and dusting off the neglected Les Paul in the corner of your living room, and you could save yourself from a more literal form of heartache – the sort that isn't often the subject of chart-toppers.

In a study published by the *Netherlands Heart Journal*, those who regularly sang or played instruments were noted to have better cardiovascular health than the less musically inclined. Researchers tested subjects aged 18 to 30 and found the guitarists, singers, flautists and pianists had lower blood pressure and reduced heart rates. Playing music fires up the sensory nervous system – also activated during your gym sessions – and the study authors believe that this gives it cardiovascular effects 'resembling those of physical exercise'.

If strumming through a moving rendition of *Mr Tambourine Man* feels beyond your capability (or if you cringe at the mere thought), then simply singing along to a playlist in the privacy of your home has benefits, too. University of London research shows that giving your lungs a workout increases levels of blood oxygen, while exercising major upper-body muscles. We're calling it band aid.

WORDS: SCARLETT WRENCH. ARTWORK: PETER CROWTHER AT DEBUT ART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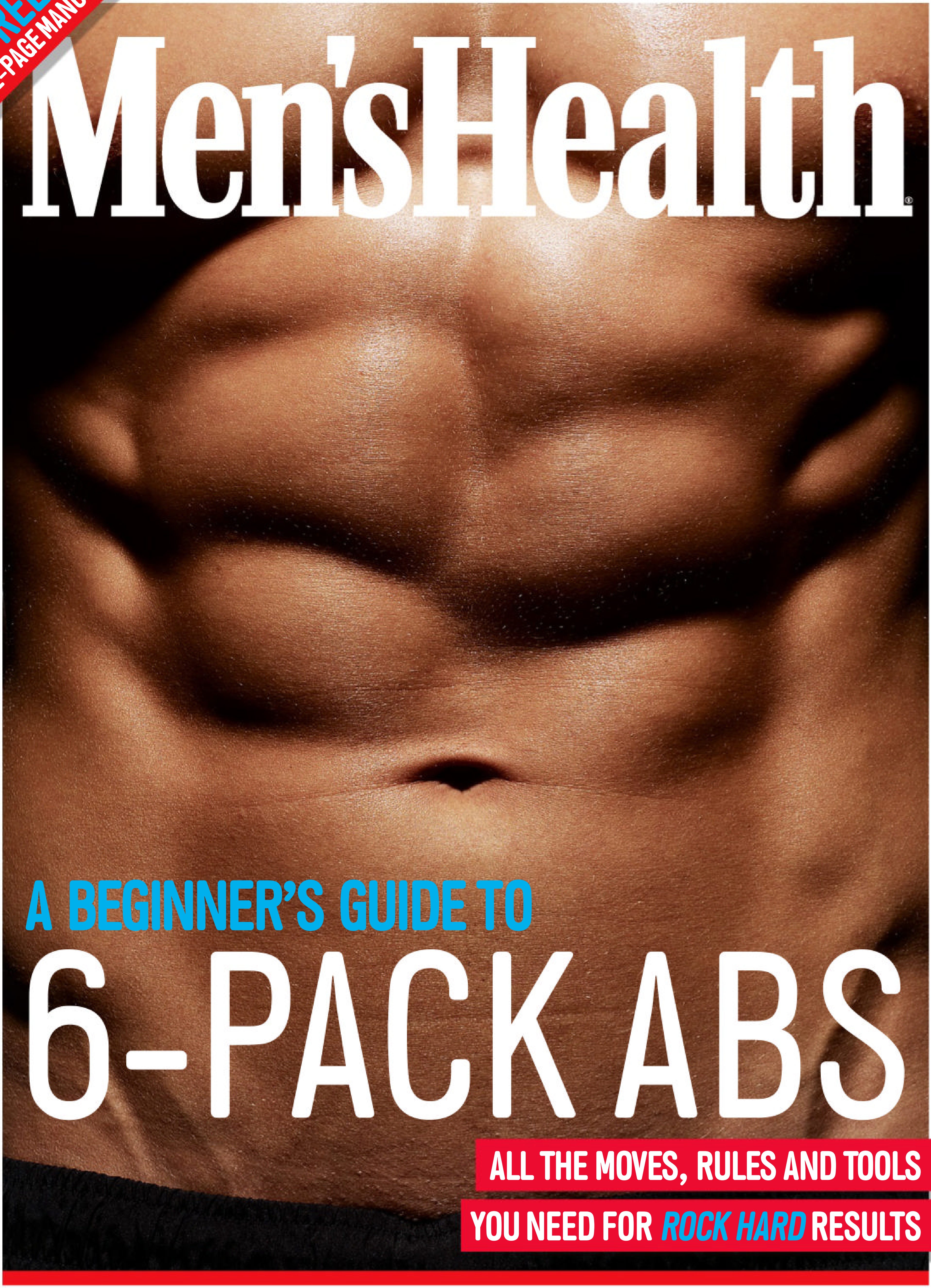

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

6-PACK ABS

ALL THE MOVES, RULES AND TOOLS YOU NEED FOR *ROCK HARD* RESULTS

Men'sHealth

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SCAN ME

SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE

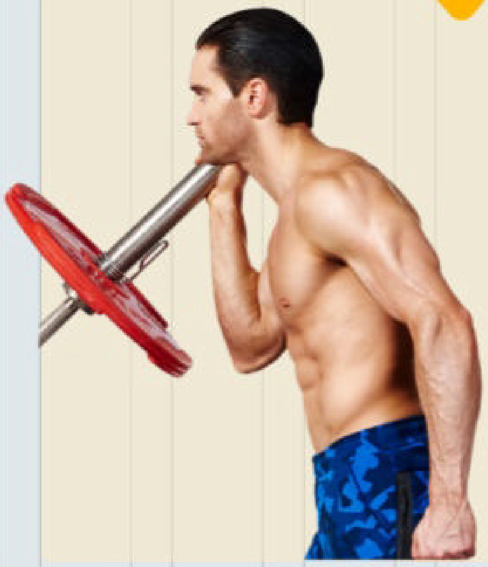
GUTTER CREDIT

YOUR 12-WEEK SIX-PACK PLAN

So you want to start the year right, right? Work through each of our simple training plans for three weeks, then progress to the next. Have faith: whatever your starting point, results will follow

P4 TORCH EXCESS FAT

This beginner-friendly session can be done anywhere and will help you burn extra calories while increasing your baseline fitness. It's treadmill-free, too.

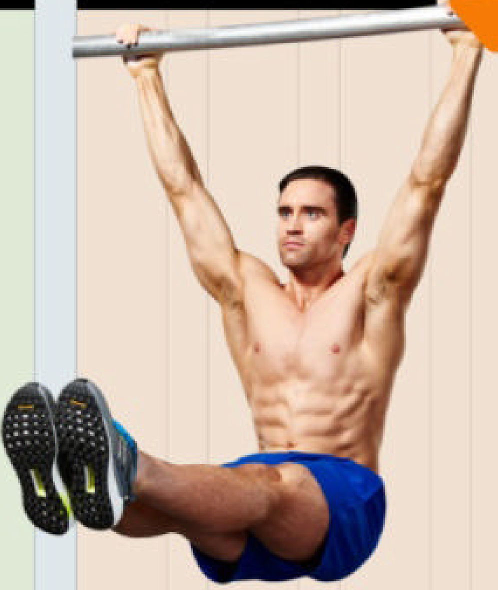


P10 CRAFT A STRONG MIDLINE

With the foundations laid down, your next phase uses heavy barbell moves to build core strength and stability, forming the foundation for laser-cut definition.

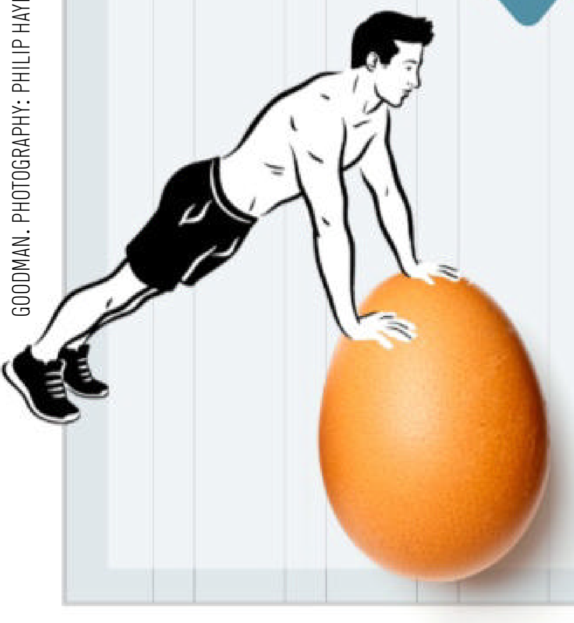
P19 HOME IN ON EVERY AB

Now the keystones are in place, it's time to really make those abs pop. These trisets will work your core through multiple planes of movement. Results guaranteed.



P26 GET HIGH-DEF RESULTS

With your new six-pack starting to take shape, now you're ready to take it to the elite level. This final workout will upgrade your core to cover-model standard.



P14 FUEL YOUR FITNESS

Your battle for abs may be fought and won in the kitchen, but it can still be painless. Here you'll find 23 foods to power your workouts and support healthy weight loss.

P24 CAP THINGS OFF

Lastly, employ some supplementary help in your quest for a fitter physique with our edit of effective pills and powders for lean mass and lasting energy.

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: MARTHA PAVLIDOU AT STUDIO 33. COVER MODEL: LEE PHILLIPS AT ANDI PETERS' MODELS. COVER GROOMING: ROZELLE PARRY AT JOY GOODMAN. PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP HAYNES. GROOMING: SABINE CHAMMAS. STYLING: ABENA OFEI. MODEL: CHRISTOPHER WHITLOW AT ANDI PETERS' MODELS

STAGE ONE: THE FAT-BURNING BASICS

METABOLIC FIRESTARTER

Thankfully, you can make a whole lot of progress with just half an hour's effort. Complete all moves, rest for 30 secs and repeat for three rounds in total. Aim to blast through this five days a week

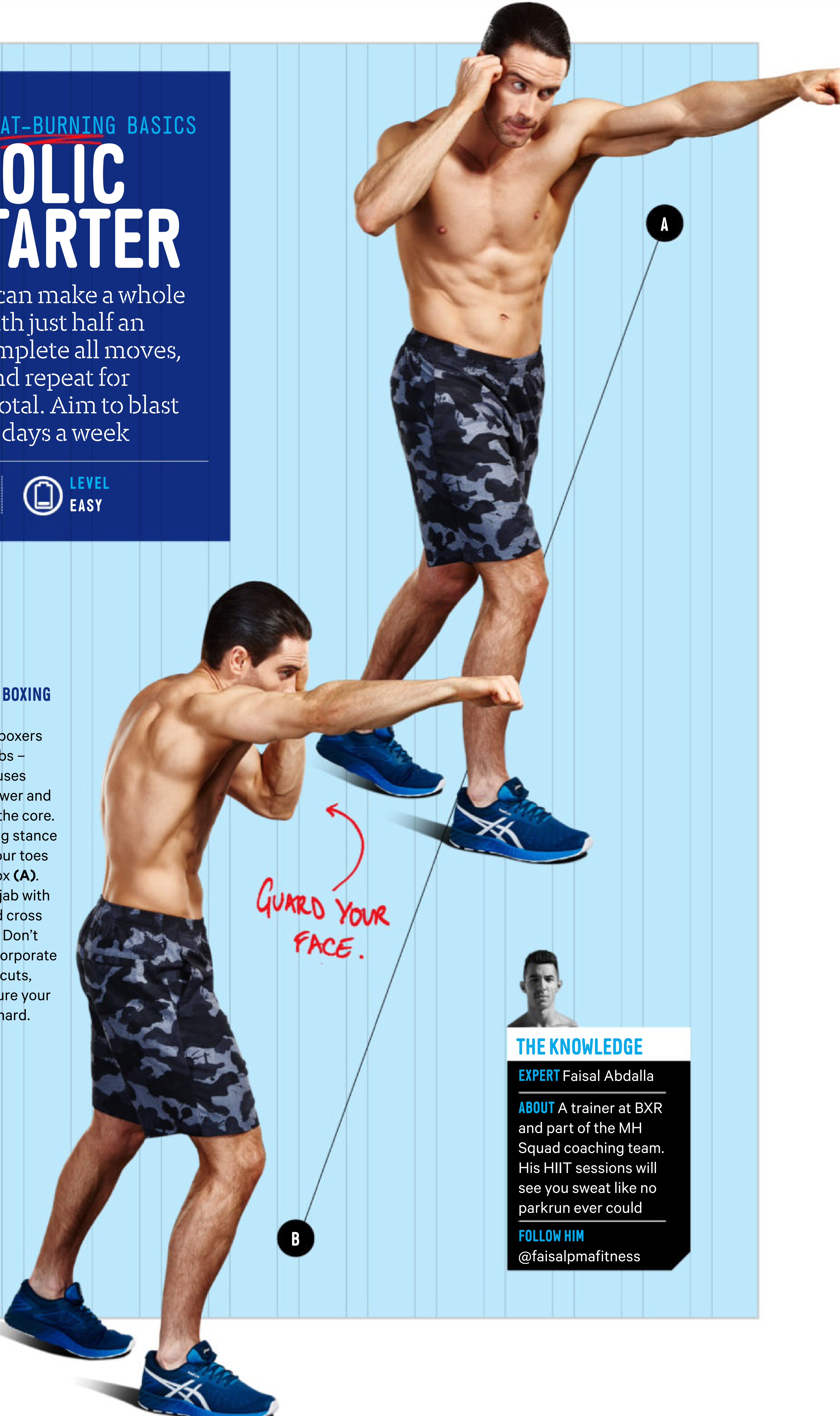
TOTAL TIME 30 MINS

LEVEL EASY

01\ SHADOW BOXING

20 SECS

There's a reason boxers sport knockout abs – their training focuses on developing power and balance through the core. Set up in a fighting stance and bounce on your toes as you shadow box **(A)**. For left-handers, jab with your right fist and cross with your left **(B)**. Don't be hesitant to incorporate hooks and upper cuts, too – just make sure your heart's pumping hard.



THE KNOWLEDGE

EXPERT Faisal Abdalla

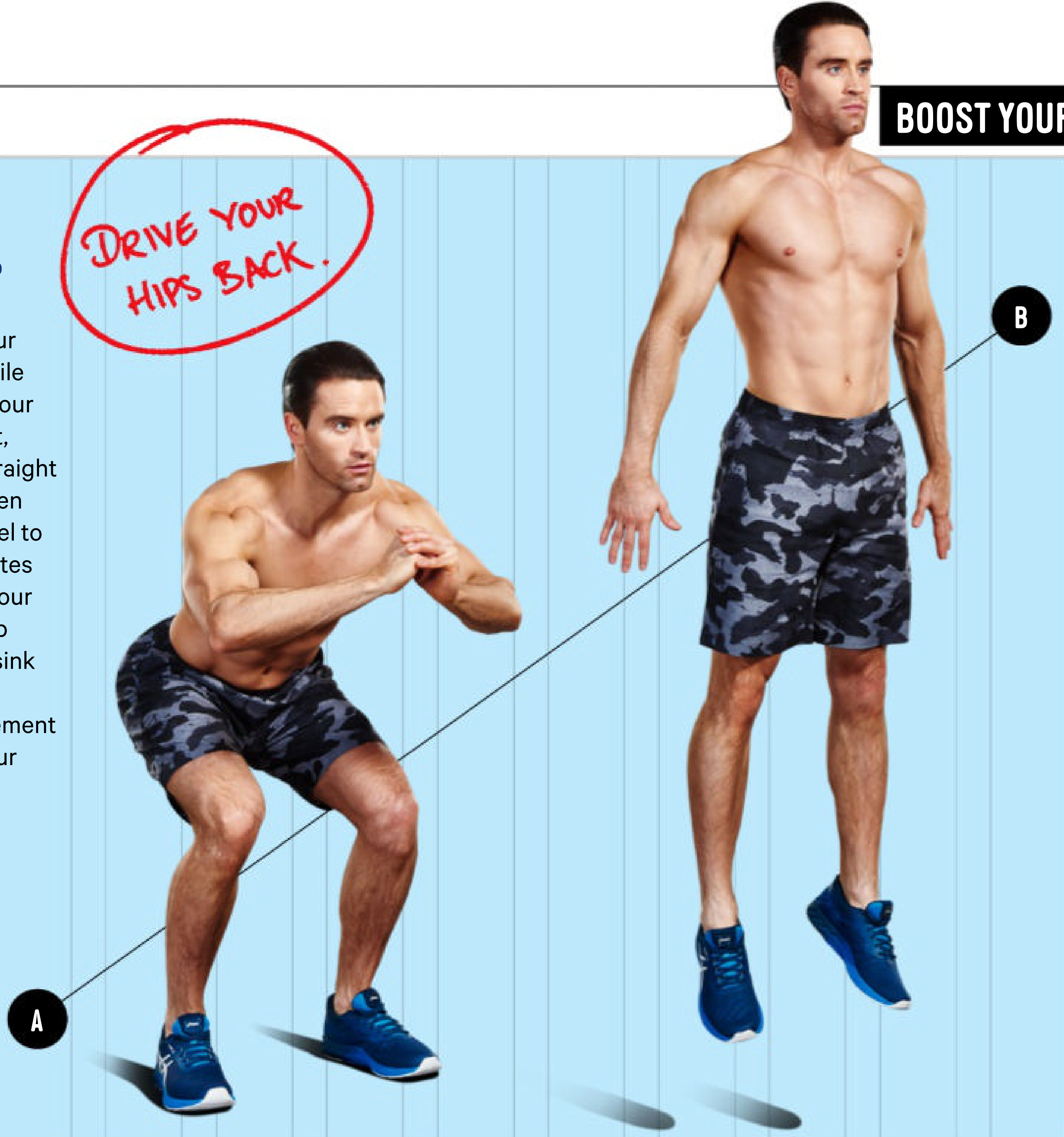
ABOUT A trainer at BXR and part of the MH Squad coaching team. His HIIT sessions will see you sweat like no parkrun ever could

FOLLOW HIM @faisalpmafitness

02\ SQUAT JUMP

40 SECS

This move will get your metabolism going while building strength in your legs. Sink into a squat, keeping your back straight and eyes up. Stop when your thighs are parallel to the floor and your glutes are about level with your knees **(A)**. Explode up into a jump **(B)**, then sink straight into the next squat. Keep the movement fast and fluid until your 40-sec stint is over.

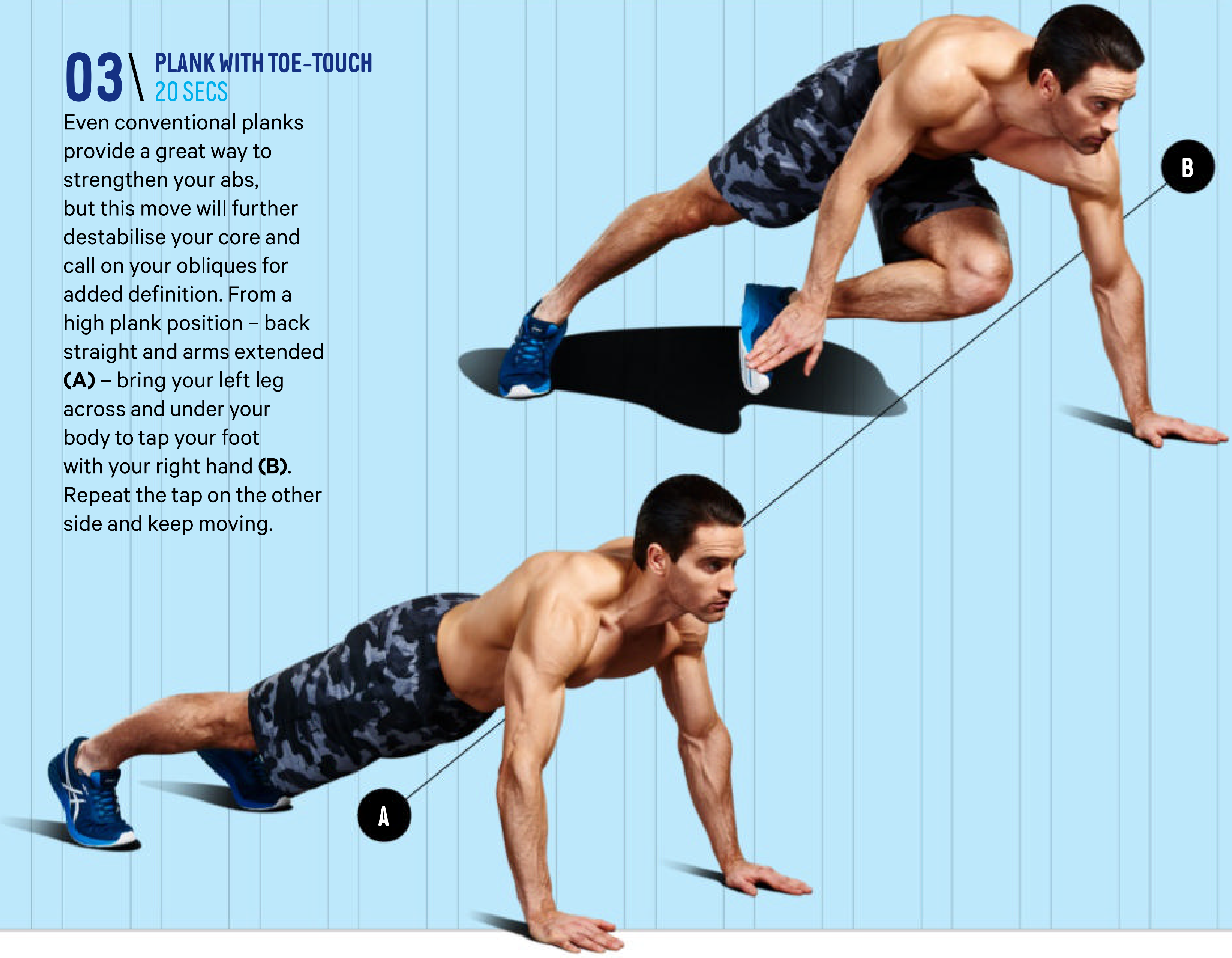


DRIVE YOUR HIPS BACK.

03\ PLANK WITH TOE-TOUCH

20 SECS

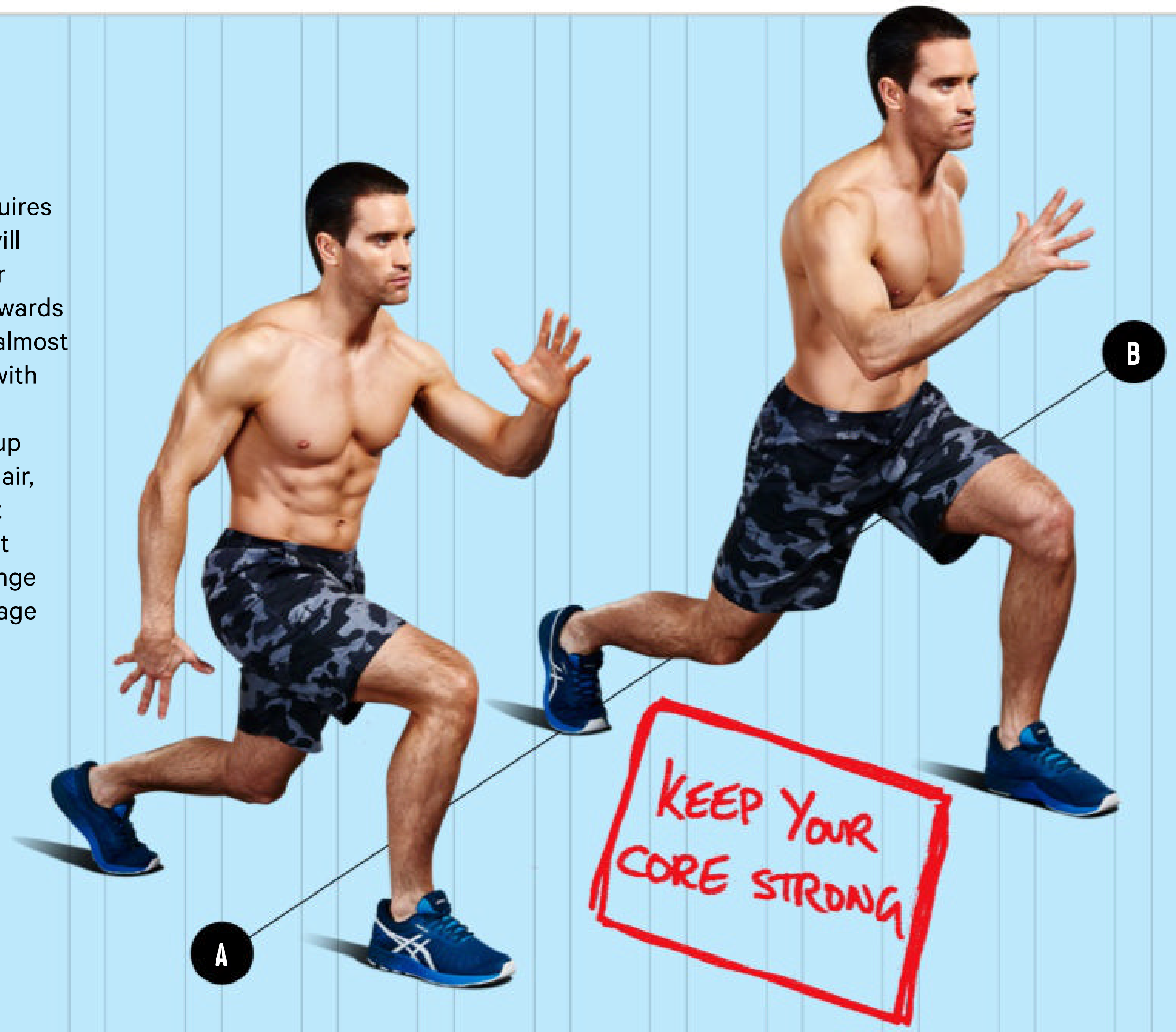
Even conventional planks provide a great way to strengthen your abs, but this move will further destabilise your core and call on your obliques for added definition. From a high plank position – back straight and arms extended **(A)** – bring your left leg across and under your body to tap your foot with your right hand **(B)**. Repeat the tap on the other side and keep moving.



04\ LUNGE JUMP

40 SECS

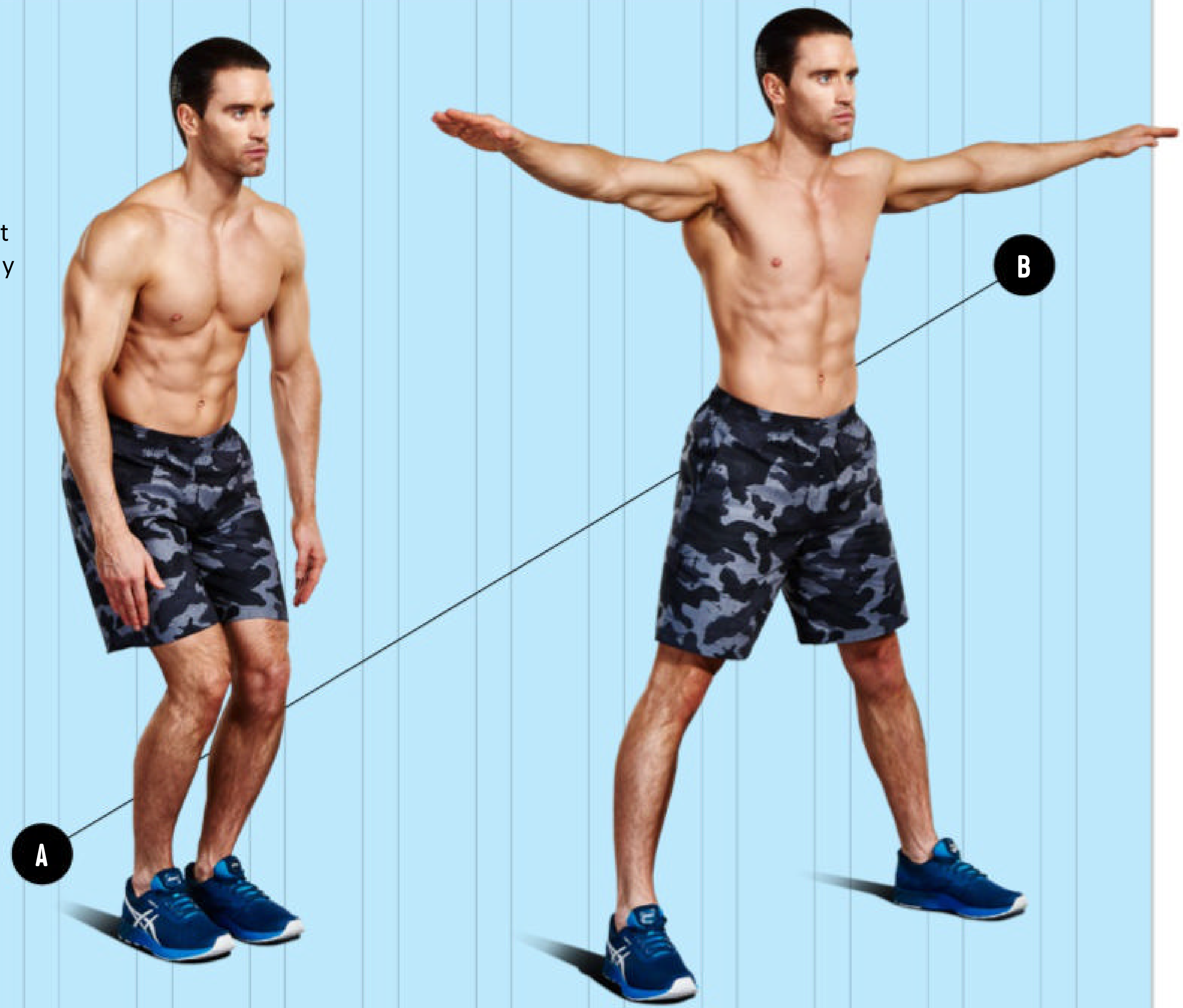
This next exercise requires good balance, which will force you to tense your midsection. Lunge forwards until your rear knee is almost touching the ground, with your front leg bent at a right angle **(A)**. Jump up and switch feet in mid-air, bringing your rear foot forwards and front foot back **(B)**. Sink into a lunge and repeat. Can't manage the jump? Step it out until you feel stronger.



05\ STAR JUMP

40 SECS

This military move might turn a few heads in the gym, but it's no joke when it comes to melting your body fat. Dip your knees to sink into a shallow squat **(A)** then explode upwards, extending your arms and feet out to the sides **(B)**. It might feel easy now, but if you're not gasping for air by the time your first 40-sec stint is up, then you're simply not pushing yourself hard enough.

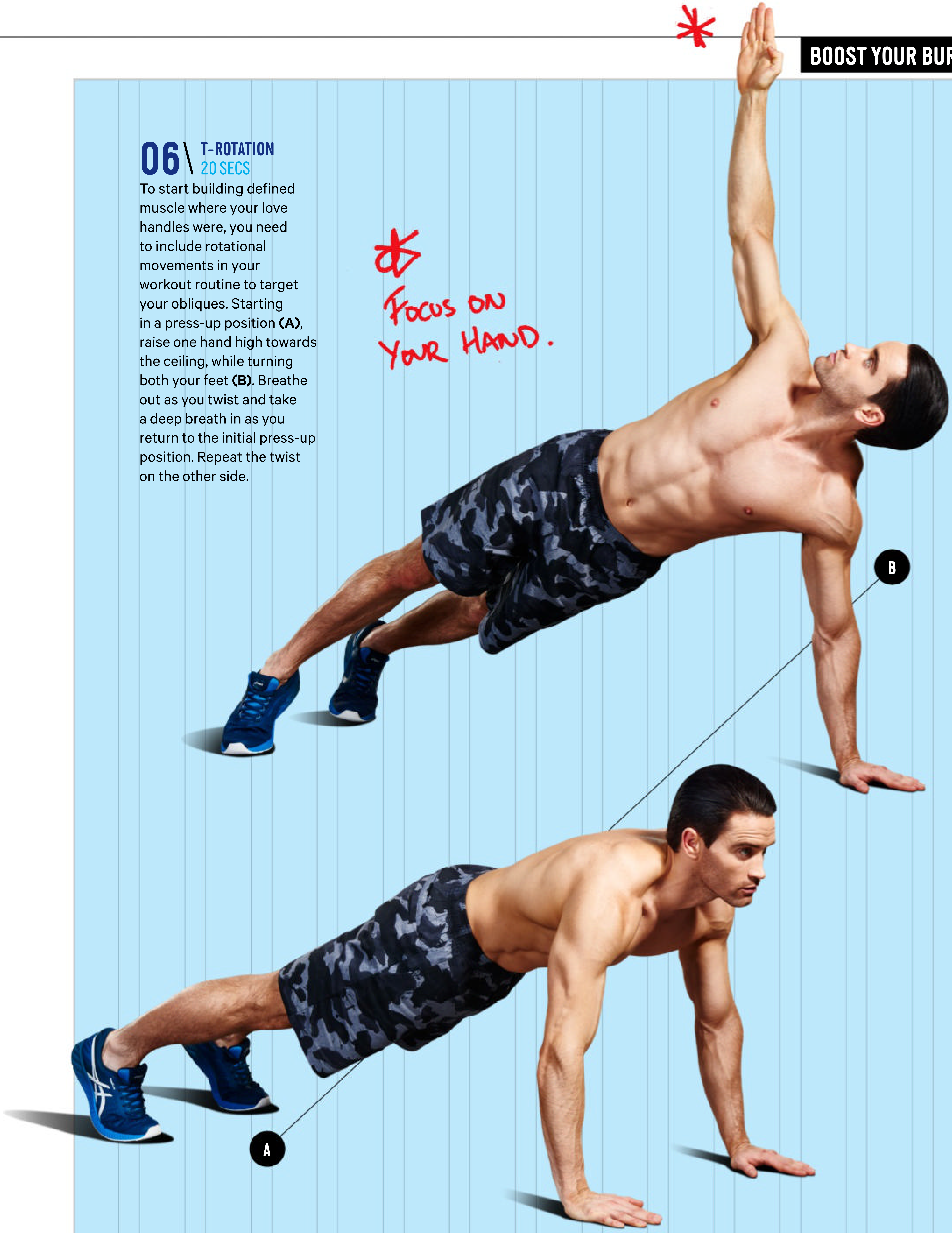


06\ T-ROTATION
20 SECS

To start building defined muscle where your love handles were, you need to include rotational movements in your workout routine to target your obliques. Starting in a press-up position **(A)**, raise one hand high towards the ceiling, while turning both your feet **(B)**. Breathe out as you twist and take a deep breath in as you return to the initial press-up position. Repeat the twist on the other side.

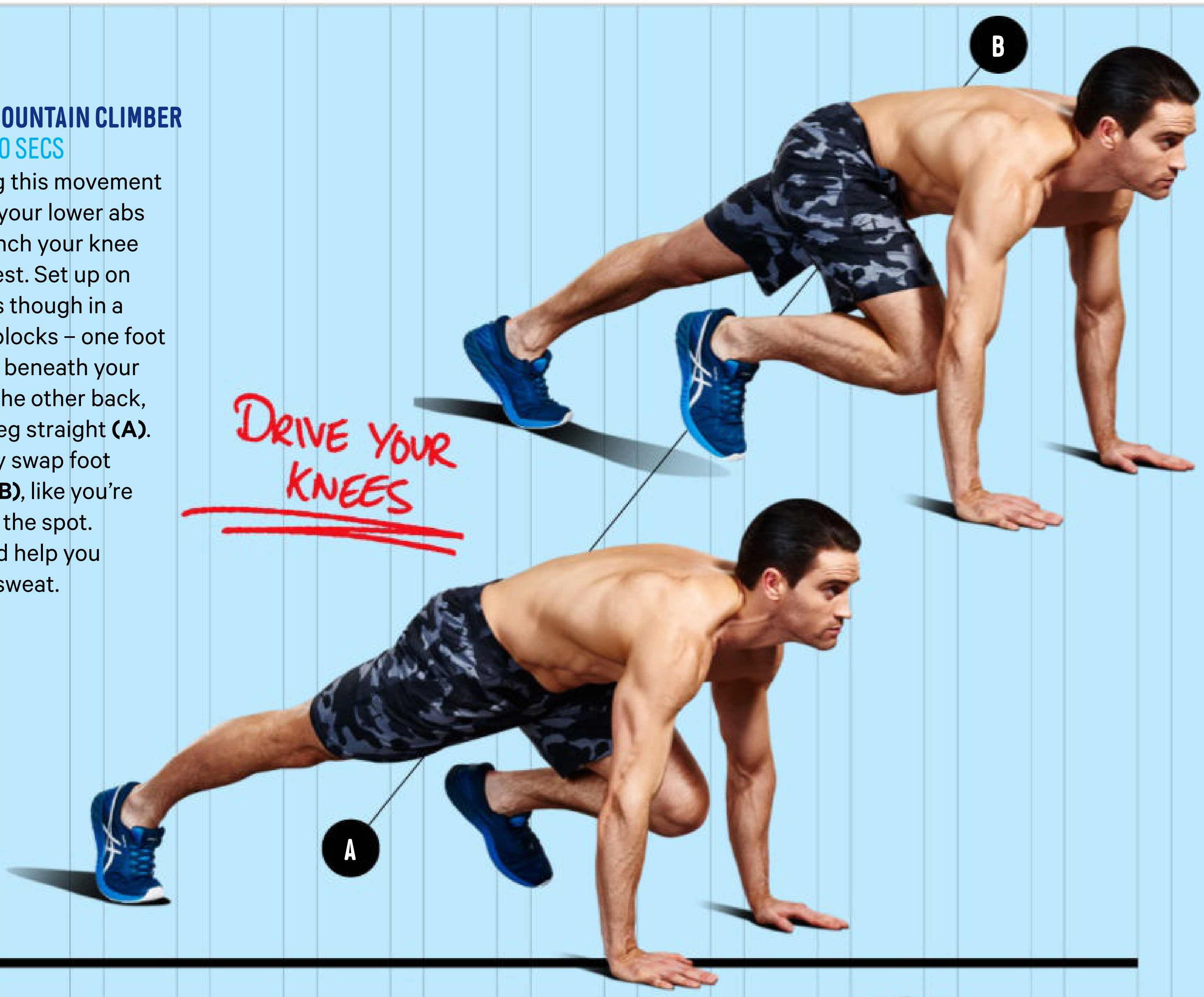
*

Focus on your hand.



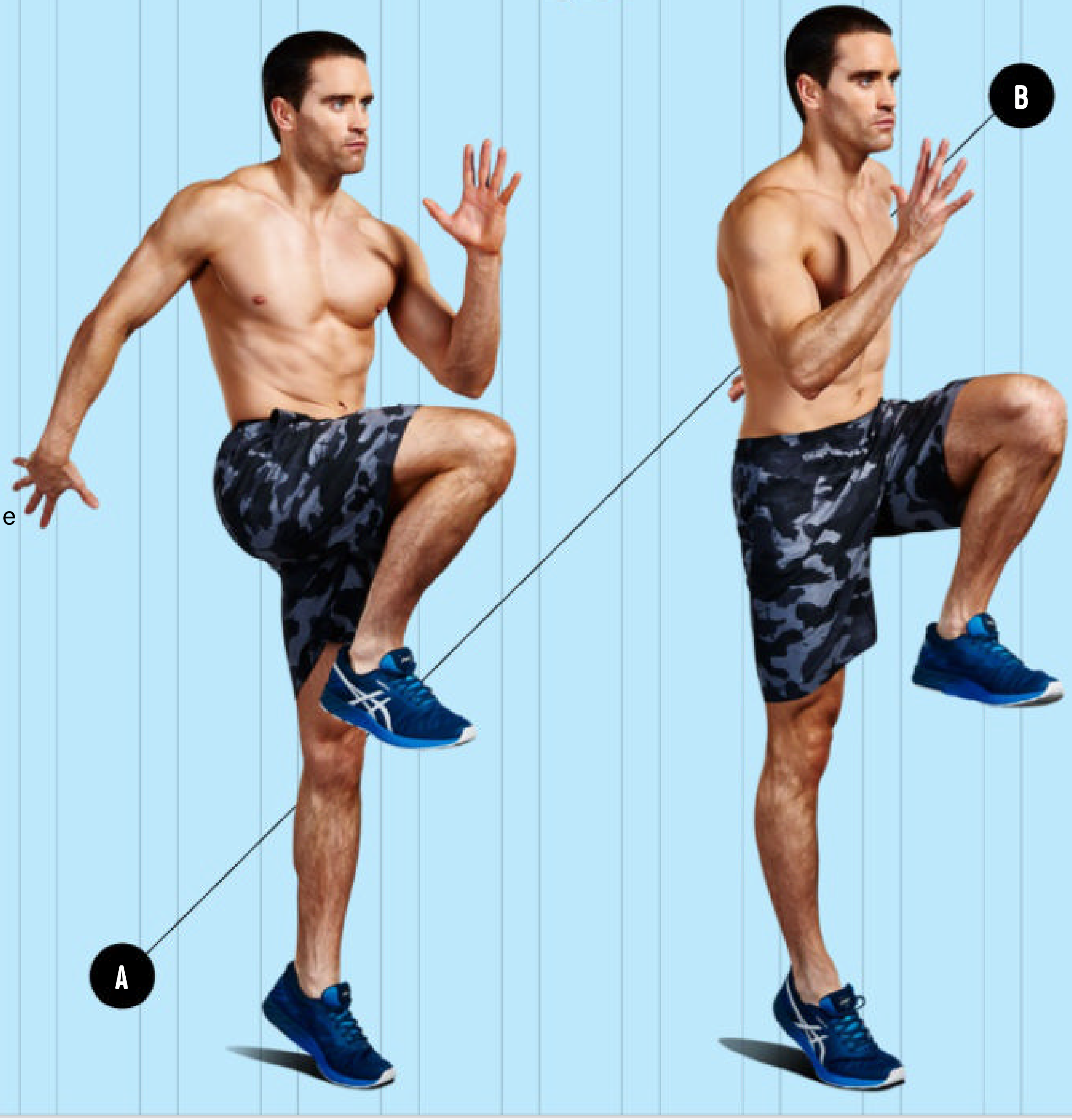
07\ MOUNTAIN CLIMBER
20 SECS

Performing this movement will target your lower abs as you crunch your knee to your chest. Set up on the floor as though in a sprinter's blocks – one foot positioned beneath your waist and the other back, with your leg straight **(A)**. Explosively swap foot positions **(B)**, like you're jogging on the spot. This should help you build up a sweat.



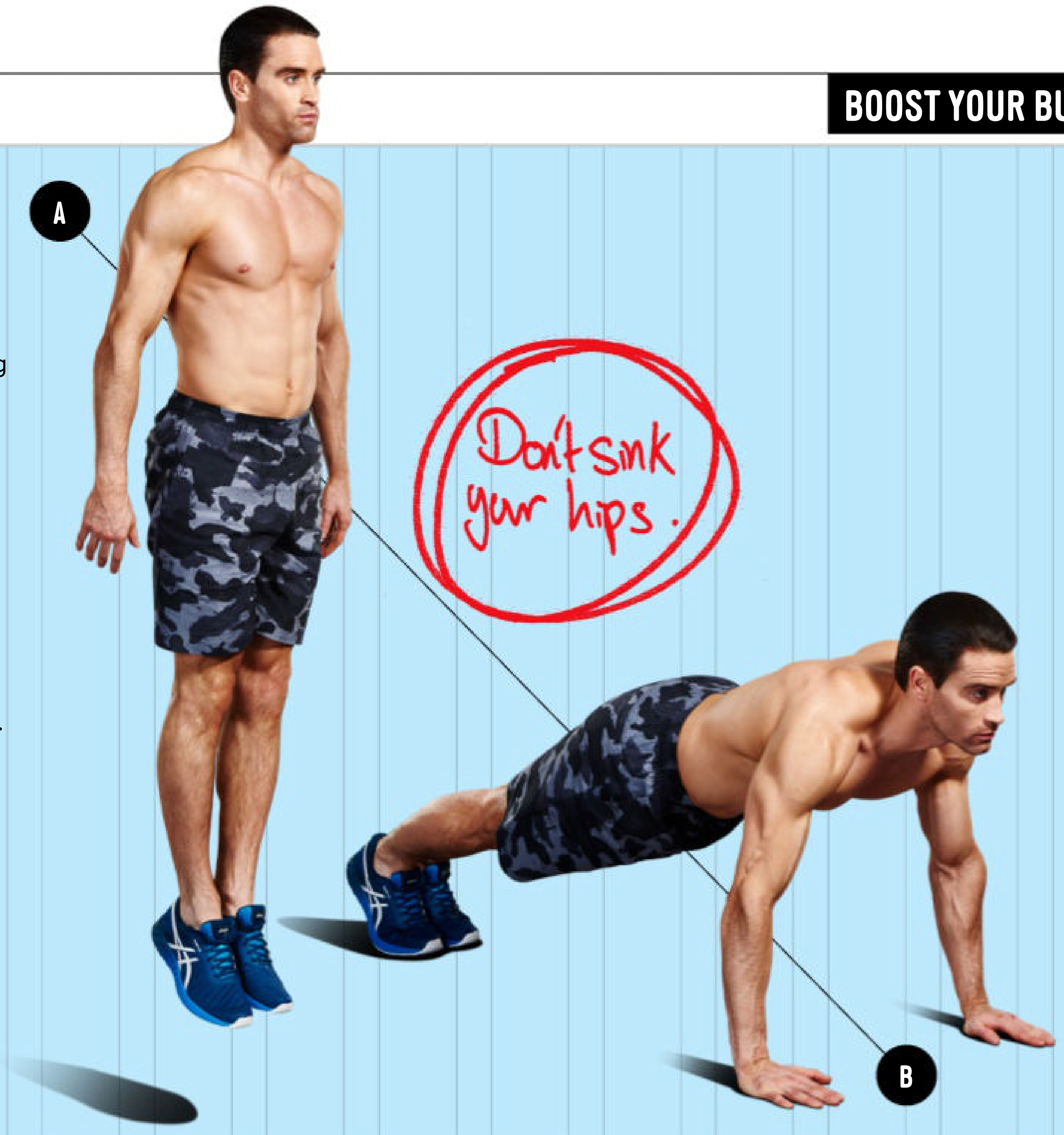
08\ HIGH KNEE
40 SECS

Sprinters have barely an ounce of fat on their bodies because their high-intensity sessions set their metabolisms soaring. Standing tall, run on the spot as fast as you can, driving through the balls of your feet to bring your knees high **(A)**. Aim to create a 90-degree angle with your raised leg each time. Keep those elbows bent, shoulders down, and swing your arms **(B)**.



09\ BURPEE
40 SECS

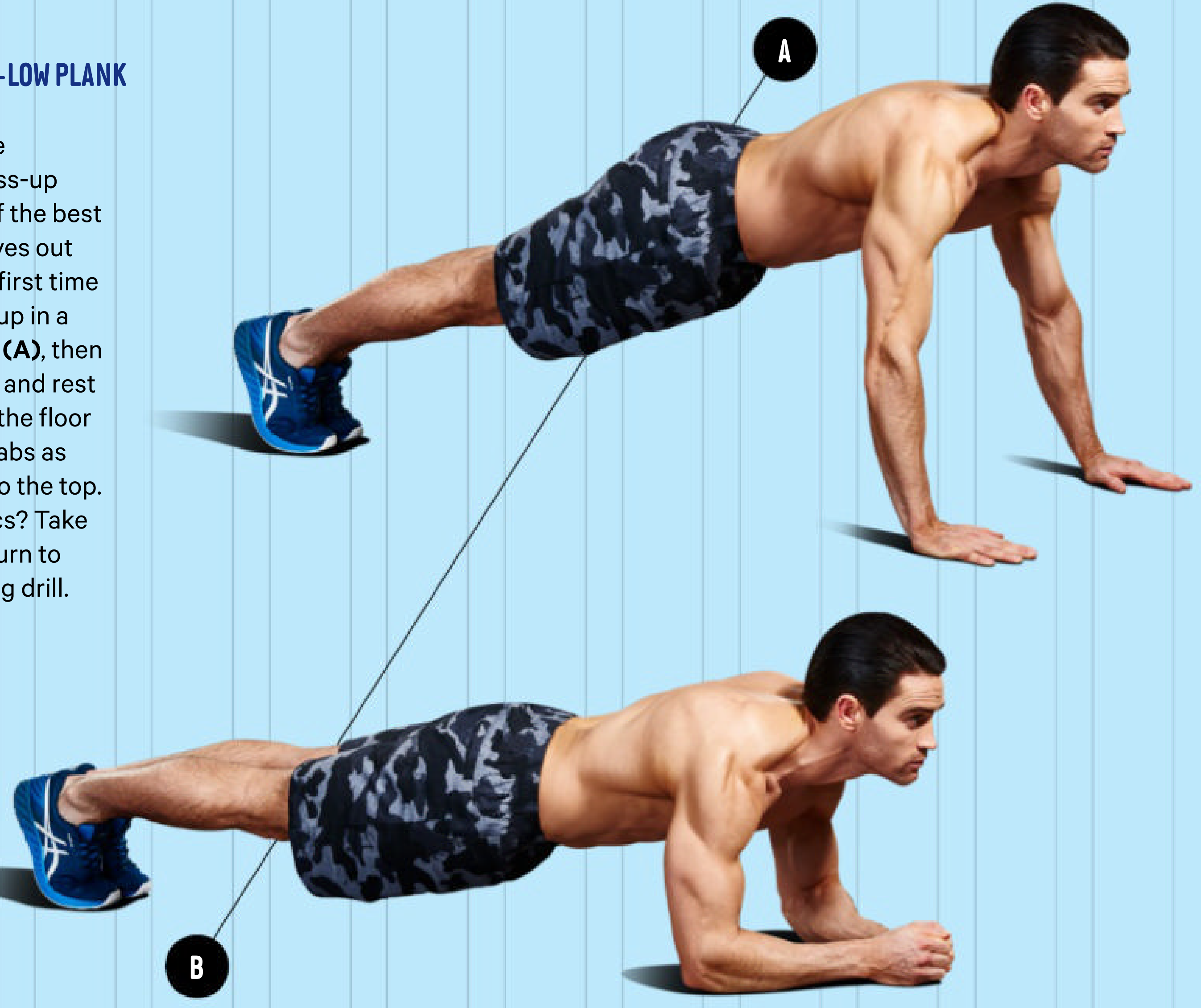
Burpees are a well-drilled military staple, strengthening soldiers' cores to help them carry heavy packs. From standing, jump **(A)**, then drop into a squat and place your palms down. Kick back into a press-up position **(B)**, then jump your feet back in towards your hands. Leap into the air and repeat. See how many reps you can manage.



Don't sink your hips.

10\ HIGH-TO-LOW PLANK
20 SECS

Your final exercise combines the press-up and plank – two of the best core-building moves out there. Not for the first time in this circuit, set up in a press-up position **(A)**, then bend your elbows and rest your forearms on the floor **(B)**. Tighten your abs as you rise back up to the top. Completed 20 secs? Take your rest then return to the shadow-boxing drill.



STAGE TWO: THE BARBELL BLAST

BUILD SOLID FOUNDATIONS

Now that you're back in your training groove and burning fat, your next move is to develop some heavy-duty core strength – which is where these supersets come in. Complete each pair three times, then move on. When it starts to feel easy, add 5kg to the bar. The harder you push, the greater the results

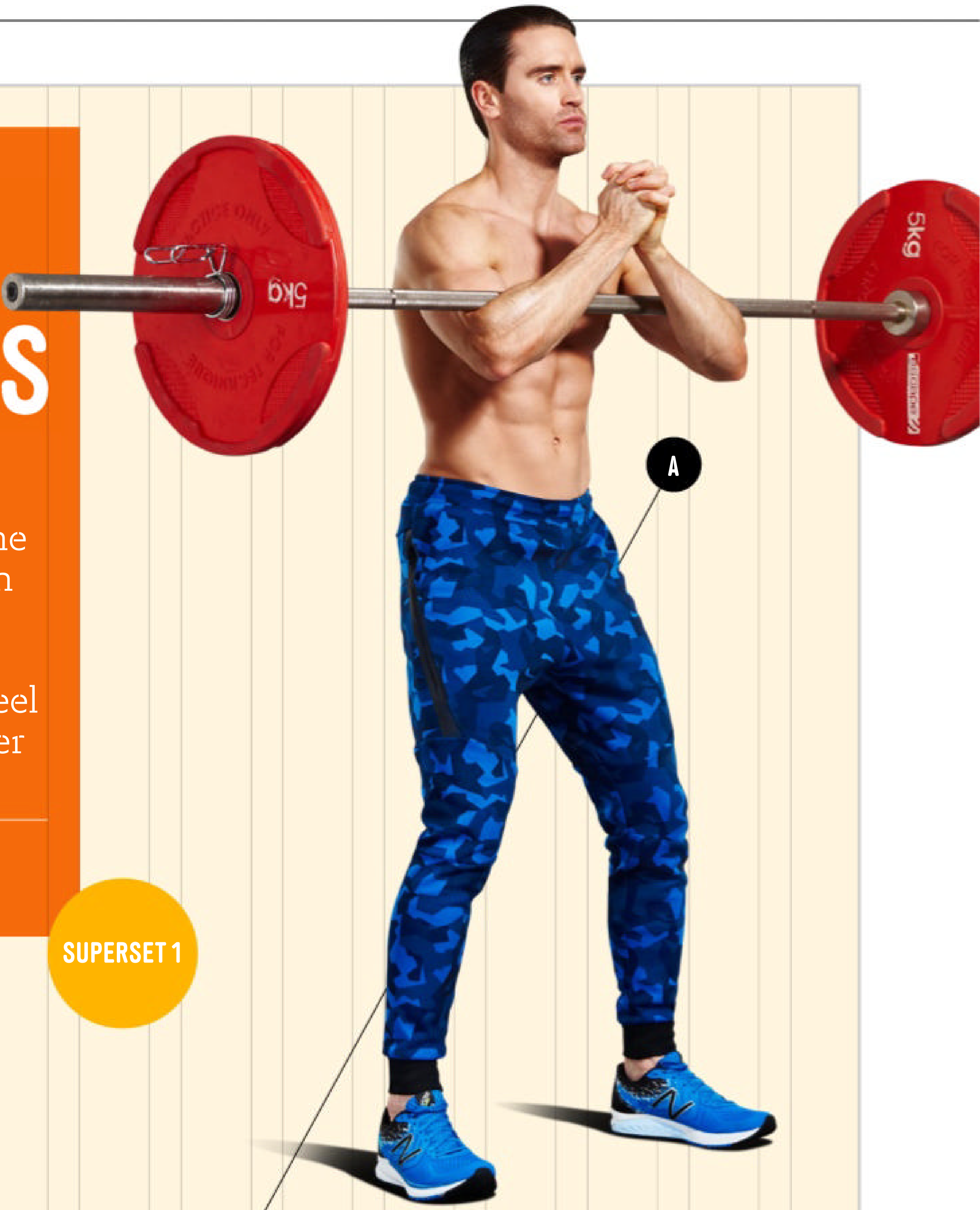
TOTAL TIME
30 MINS

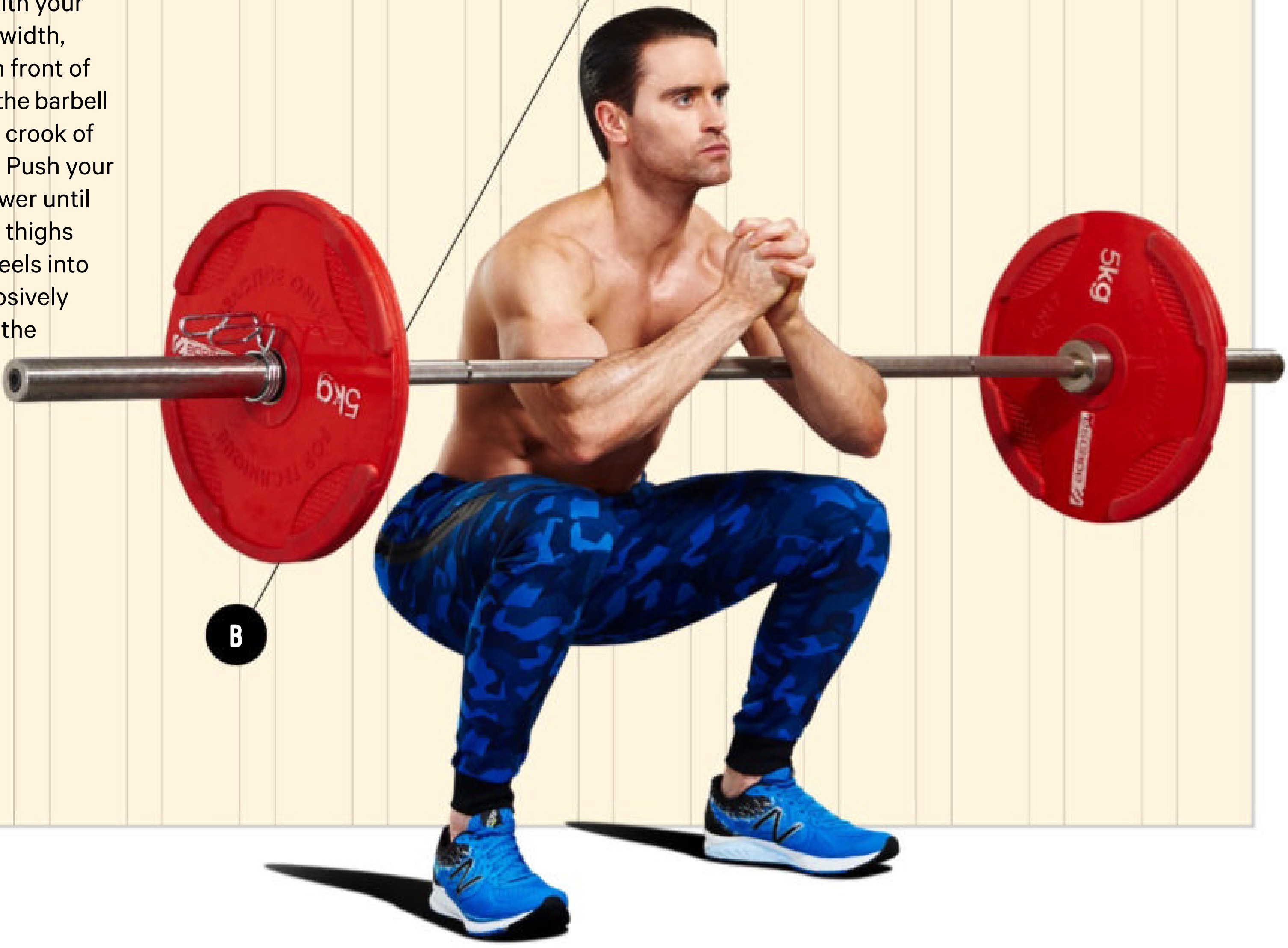
LEVEL
MEDIUM

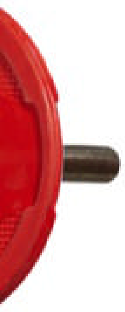
SUPERSET 1

01a \ ZERCHER SQUAT
8 REPS

With the weight in front of your body, your core is tasked with keeping you upright. Stand with your feet at shoulder width, hands clasped in front of your chest with the barbell supported in the crook of your elbows **(A)**. Push your hips back and lower until the bar hits your thighs **(B)**. Drive your heels into the floor to explosively push back up to the start position.



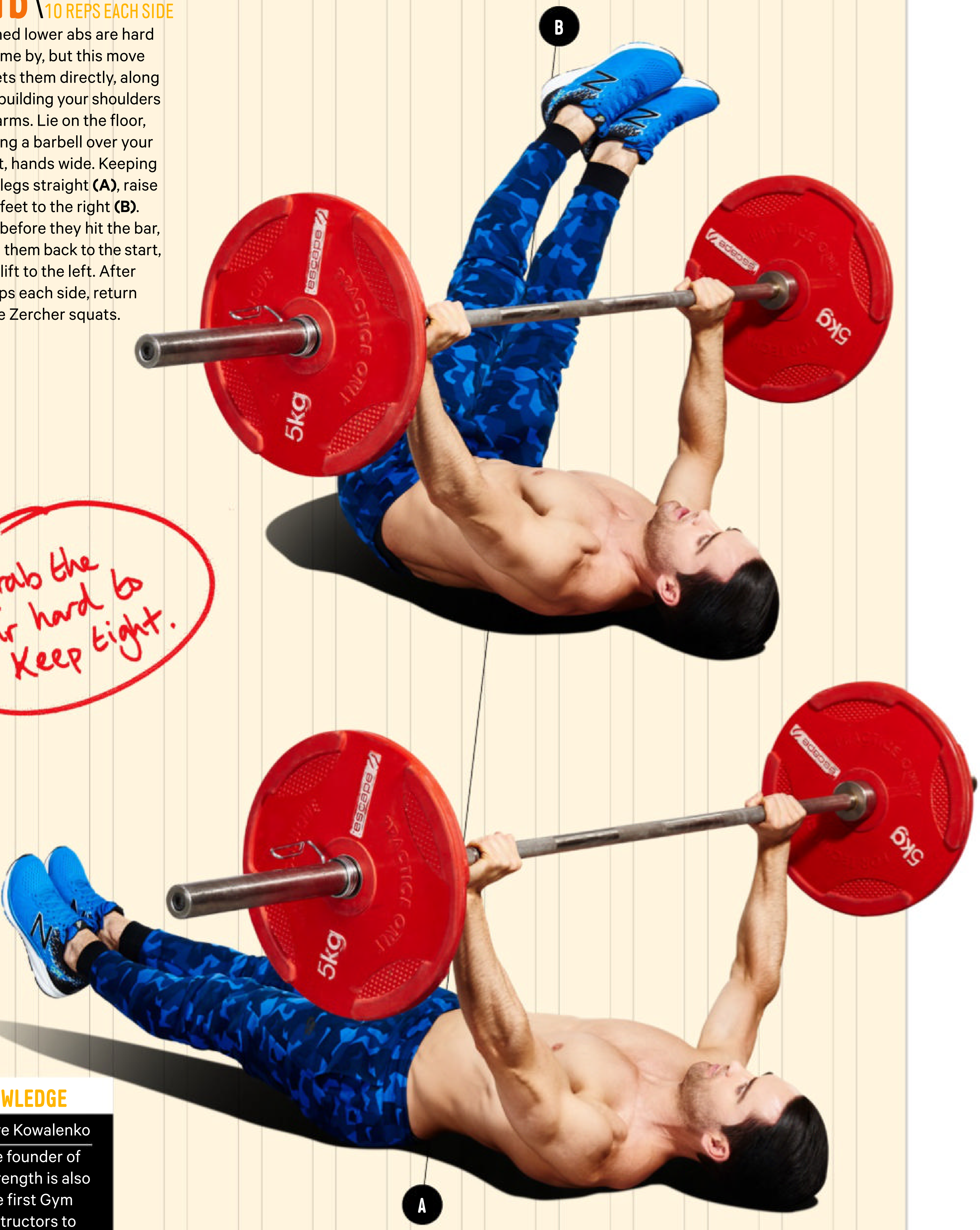




01b \ FLOOR WIPER
10 REPS EACH SIDE

Defined lower abs are hard to come by, but this move targets them directly, along with building your shoulders and arms. Lie on the floor, holding a barbell over your chest, hands wide. Keeping your legs straight **(A)**, raise your feet to the right **(B)**. Just before they hit the bar, bring them back to the start, then lift to the left. After 10 reps each side, return to the Zercher squats.

Grab the bar hard to keep tight.



THE KNOWLEDGE

NAME Steve Kowalenko

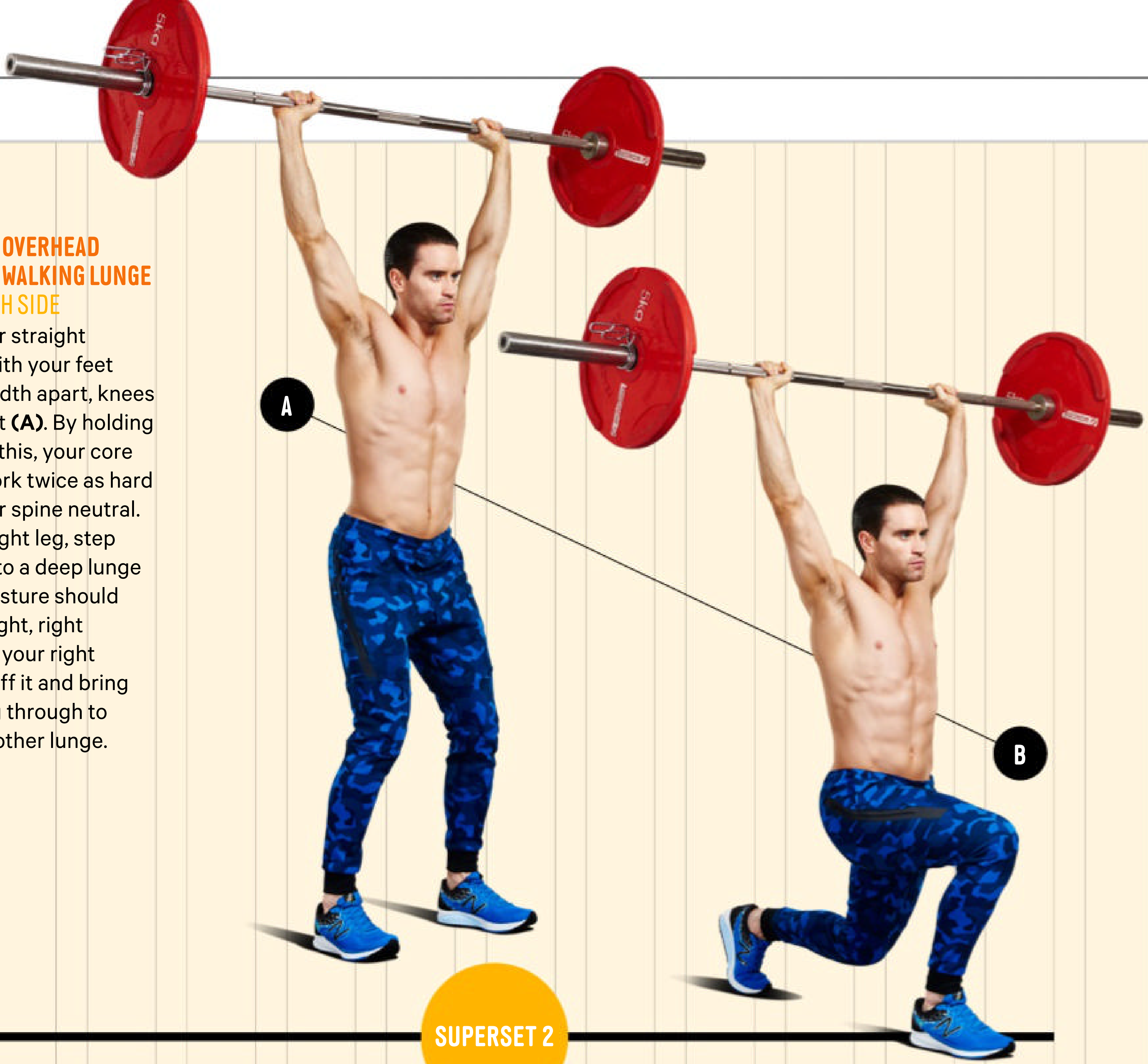
ABOUT The founder of Virtus Strength is also one of the first Gym Jones instructors to be certified in the UK

FOLLOW HIM @virtus_strength

02a \ OVERHEAD WALKING LUNGE

10 REPS EACH SIDE

Hold the bar straight overhead with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent **(A)**. By holding the bar like this, your core needs to work twice as hard to keep your spine neutral. With your right leg, step forwards into a deep lunge **(B)**. Your posture should remain upright, right knee above your right foot. Push off it and bring your left leg through to perform another lunge.

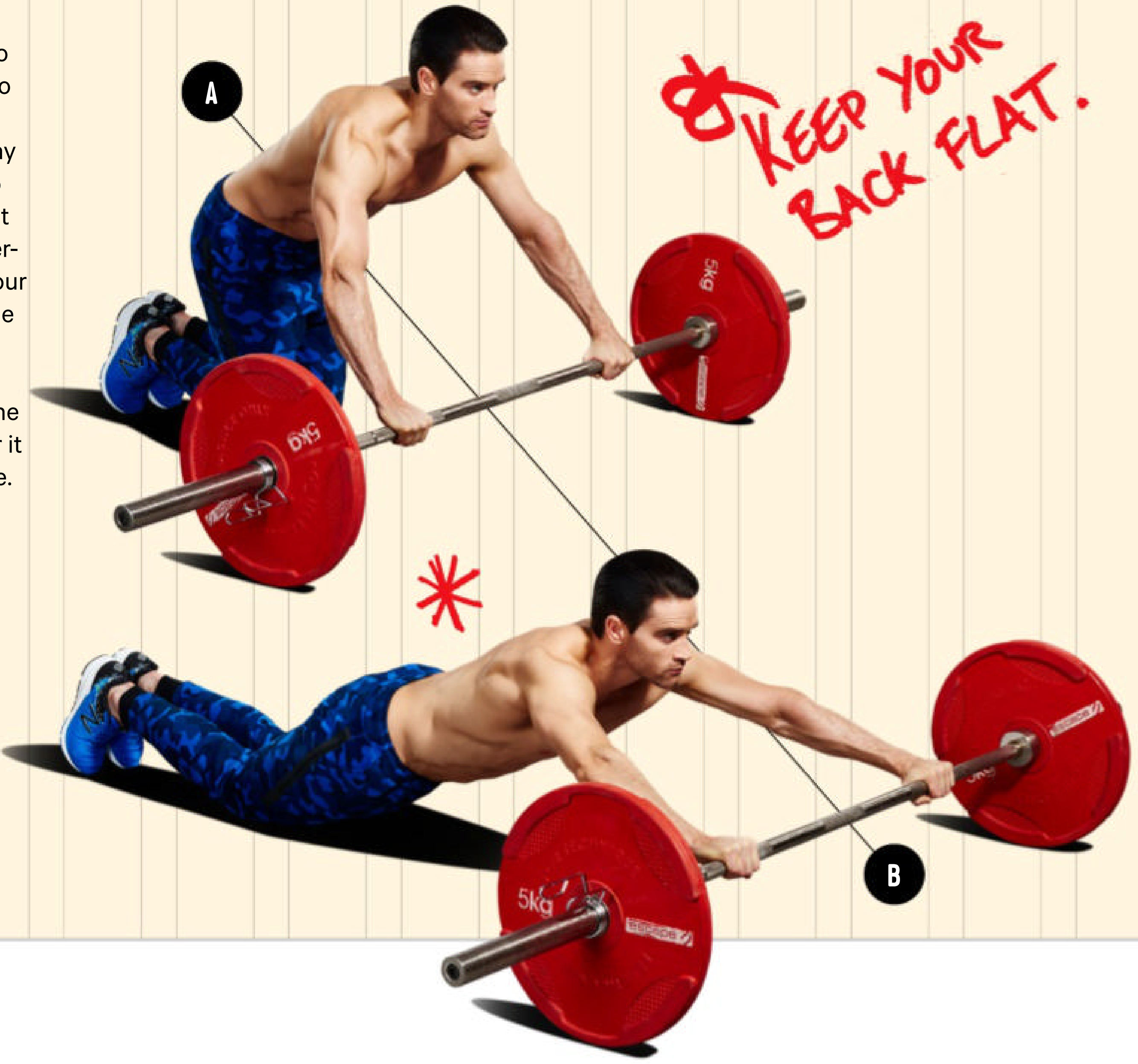


SUPERSET 2

02b \ BARBELL ROLLOUT

12 REPS

For this move, you need to brace your core in order to stop you from falling over as you roll the barbell away from you. Load the bar up with 5kg plates and grab it with an overhand, shoulder-width grip **(A)**. Position your shoulders directly over the barbell and slowly roll the bar forwards **(B)**. Pause, then reverse the move. The further you go, the harder it gets. Go back to the lunge.

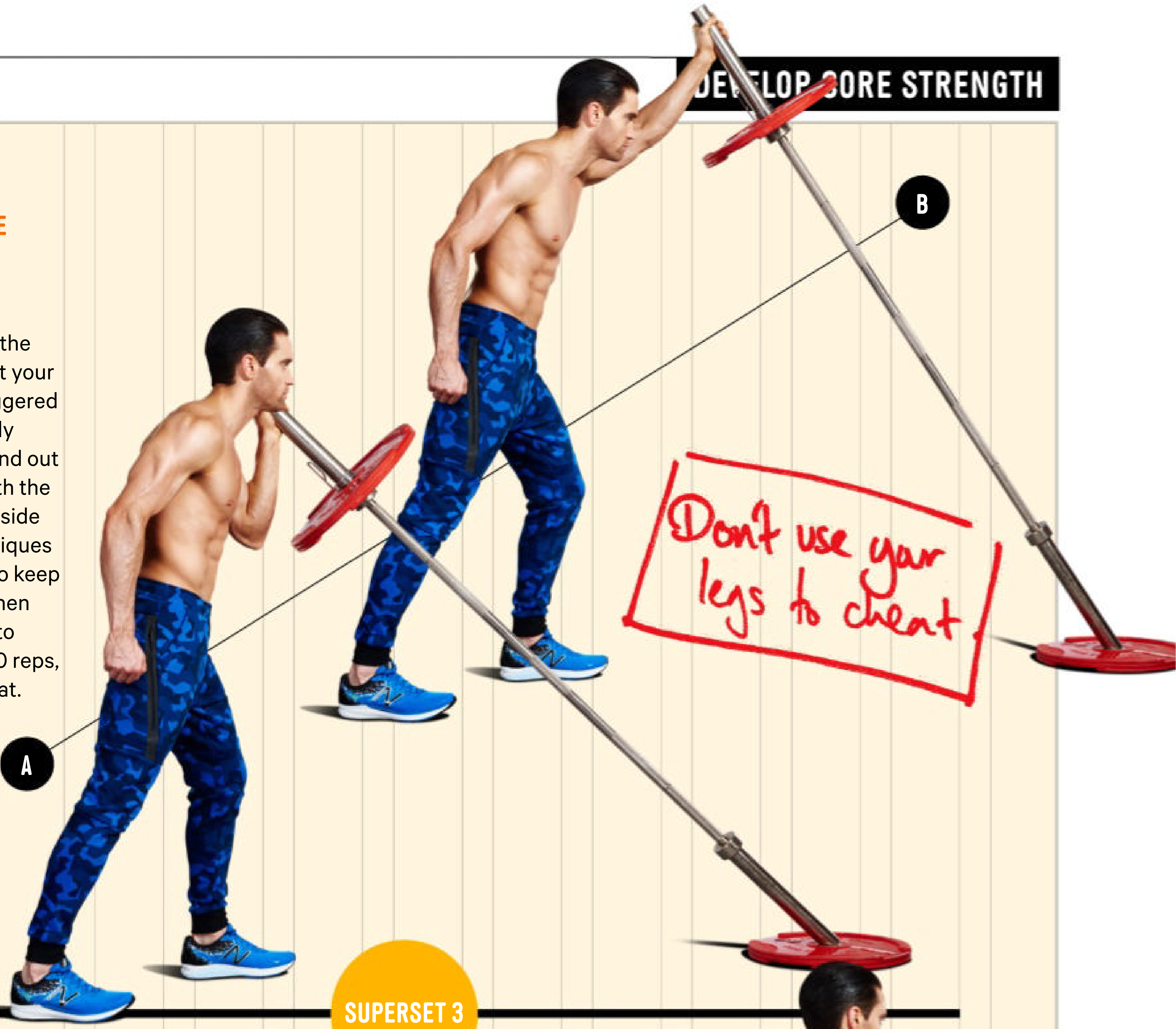


KEEP YOUR BACK FLAT.

03a \ LANDMINE PRESS

10 REPS EACH SIDE

Raise the barbell to shoulder height, with the other arm extended at your side and feet in a staggered stance **(A)**. Explosively press the weight up and out in front of you **(B)**. With the weight shifted to one side of your body, your obliques will be working hard to keep you straight. Pause, then slowly return the bar to shoulder height. Do 10 reps, switch arms and repeat.

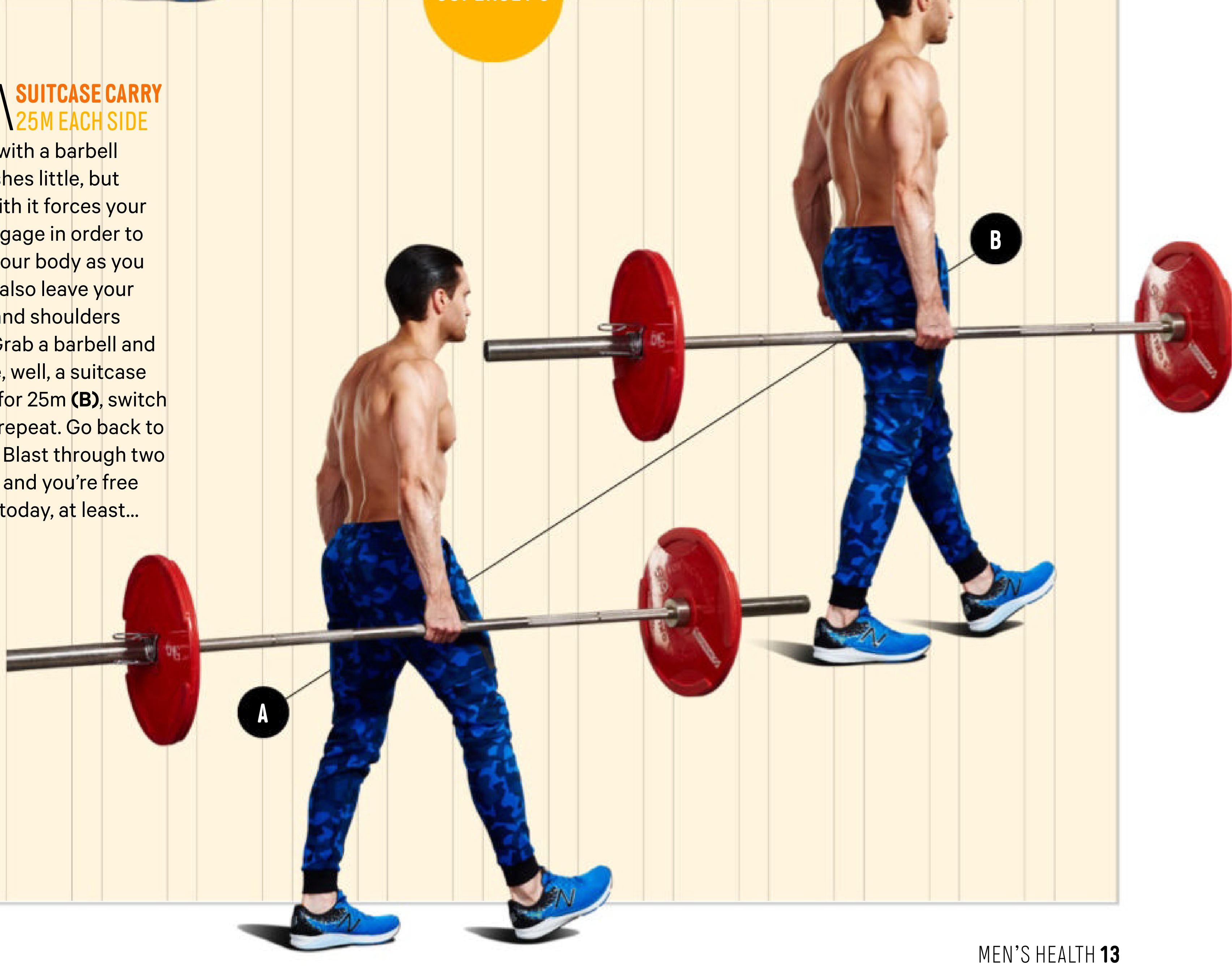

A
B
Don't use your legs to cheat

SUPERSET 3

03b \ SUITCASE CARRY

25M EACH SIDE

Standing with a barbell accomplishes little, but walking with it forces your core to engage in order to stabilise your body as you move. It'll also leave your obliques and shoulders burning. Grab a barbell and hold it like, well, a suitcase **(A)**. Walk for 25m **(B)**, switch arms and repeat. Go back to the press. Blast through two more sets and you're free to go. For today, at least...



23 WAYS TO FUEL YOUR GOALS

EASY WINS FOR BIGGER LOSSES

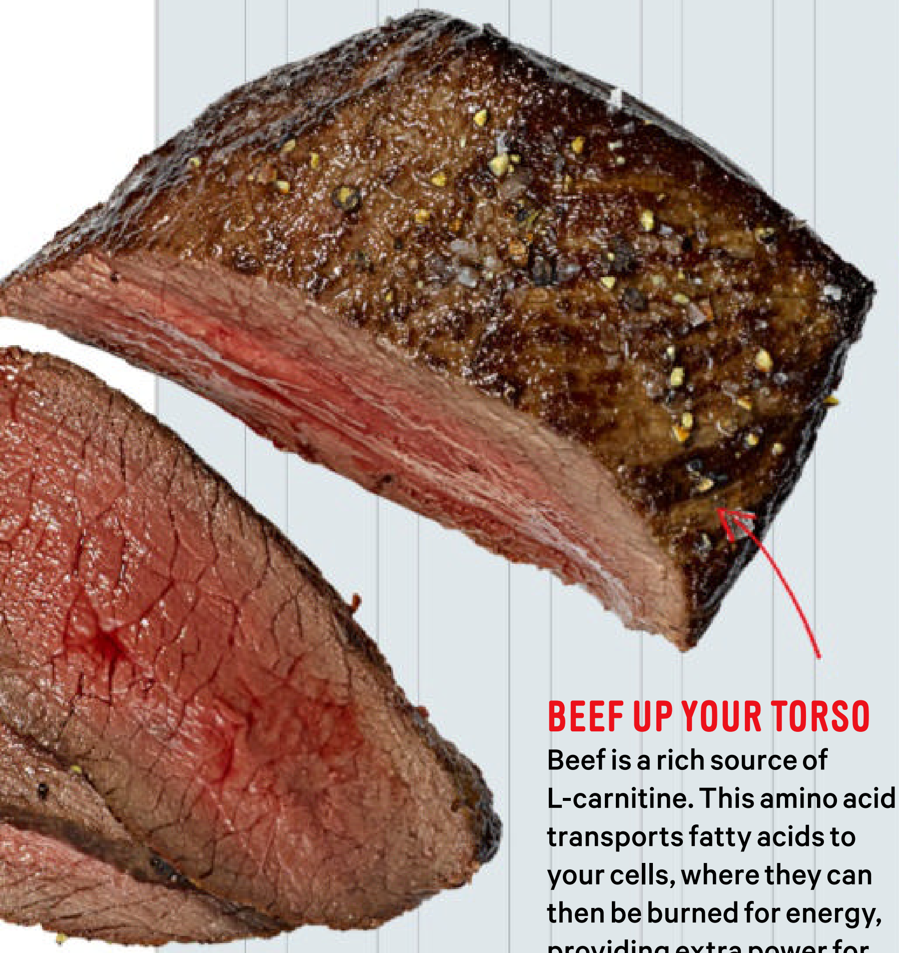
Hustling at the gym counts for little if you aren't giving your eating habits the same focus. But overhauling your diet needn't be a drag. Our shopping list of fat loss-supporting foods won't leave you hungry. Save the hard graft for your workouts

SWEET RELIEF

The anthocyanins that give strawberries their hue have been shown to reduce insulin spikes after eating, making them doubly beneficial for satisfying a sweet tooth. Blend a handful into your protein shakes.

GOLDEN YEARS

Heed the call of curry night. Shirt-staining Indian spice turmeric might help to stave off age-related muscle loss, thanks to its active ingredient curcumin. It'll make your grilled meat more exciting, too.



BEEF UP YOUR TORSO

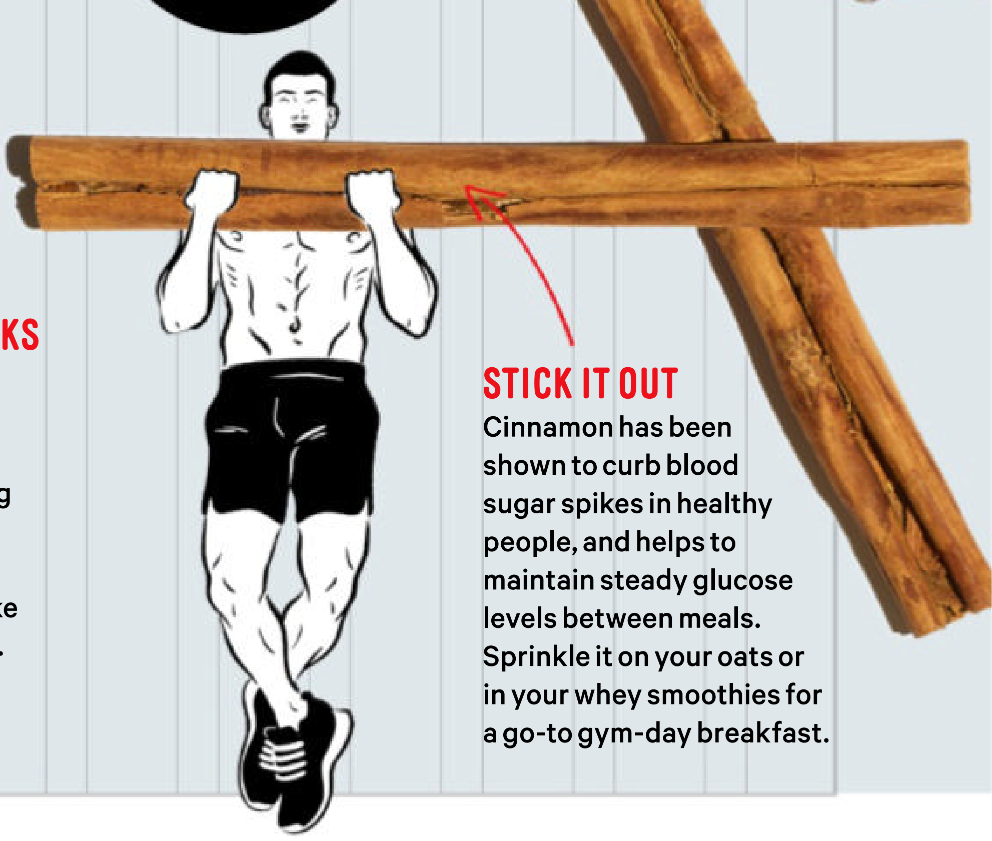
Beef is a rich source of L-carnitine. This amino acid transports fatty acids to your cells, where they can then be burned for energy, providing extra power for your six-pack sessions.

16%

OF YOUR IRON RDA IN 1 TBSP

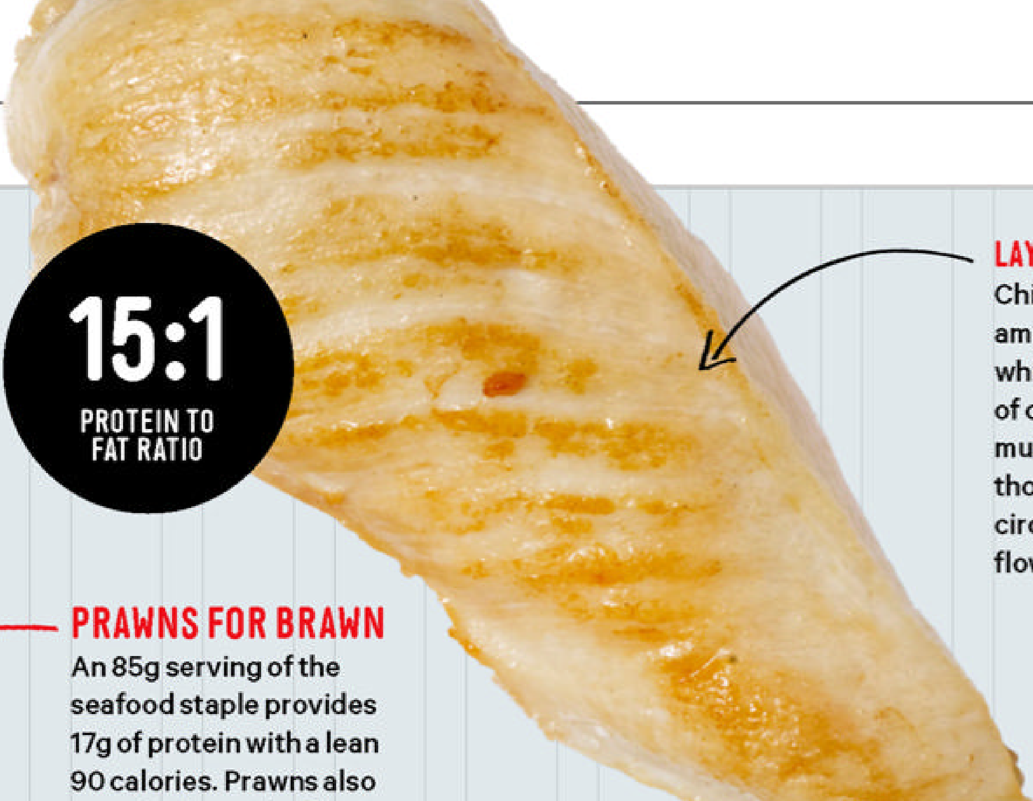
SHELL OUT ON SNACKS

Mineral- and fibre-rich pistachios are lower in calories than most nuts, with a handful containing just 150-odd. Plus, the arduous de-shelling process means you'll take longer to finish the bag...



STICK IT OUT

Cinnamon has been shown to curb blood sugar spikes in healthy people, and helps to maintain steady glucose levels between meals. Sprinkle it on your oats or in your whey smoothies for a go-to gym-day breakfast.



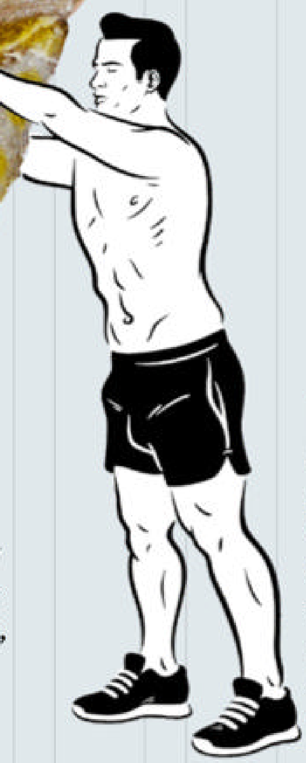
15:1
PROTEIN TO FAT RATIO

LAY WASTE TO DOMS

Chicken contains the amino acid beta-alanine, which is a building block of carnosine. This reduces muscle acidity during those high-intensity core circuits. Aching abs have flown the coop.

PRAWNS FOR BRAWN

An 85g serving of the seafood staple provides 17g of protein with a lean 90 calories. Prawns also contain the antioxidant astaxanthin, which reduces inflammation and oxidative damage post-workout.

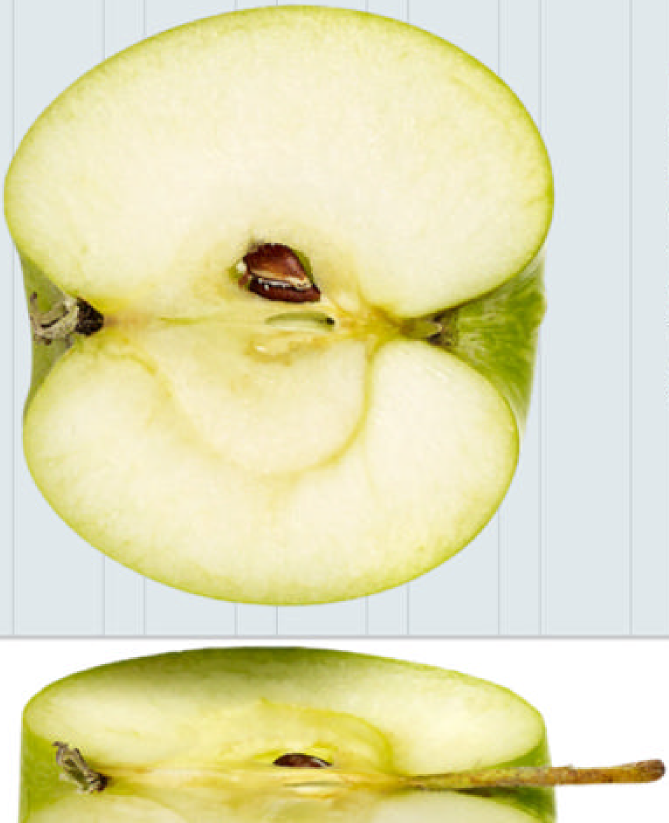


ALL PRAISE COD

White fish is high in quality protein and micronutrients but low in calories and fats, making it a perfect post-workout repair package for those looking to cut weight. Just dispense with the batter. And the chips.

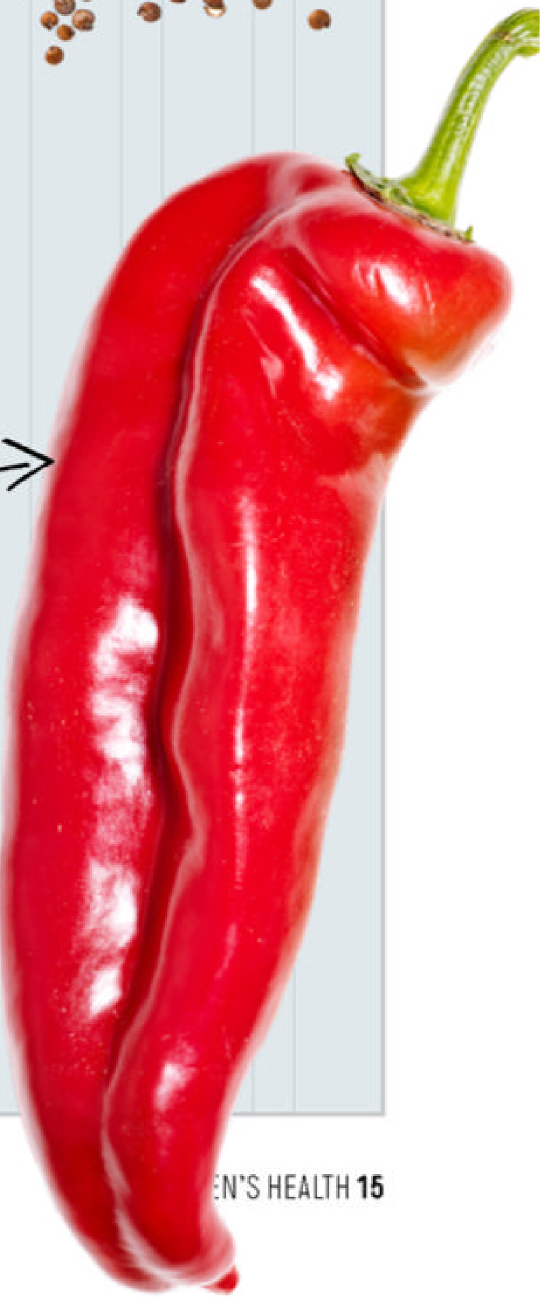
THE COMPLETE CARB

Now that we can all finally pronounce it, use quinoa to fuel your workouts. It contains all the essential amino acids and is naturally devoid of gluten, making it a far smarter buy than any processed 'free from' carb.



AN APPLE A DAY

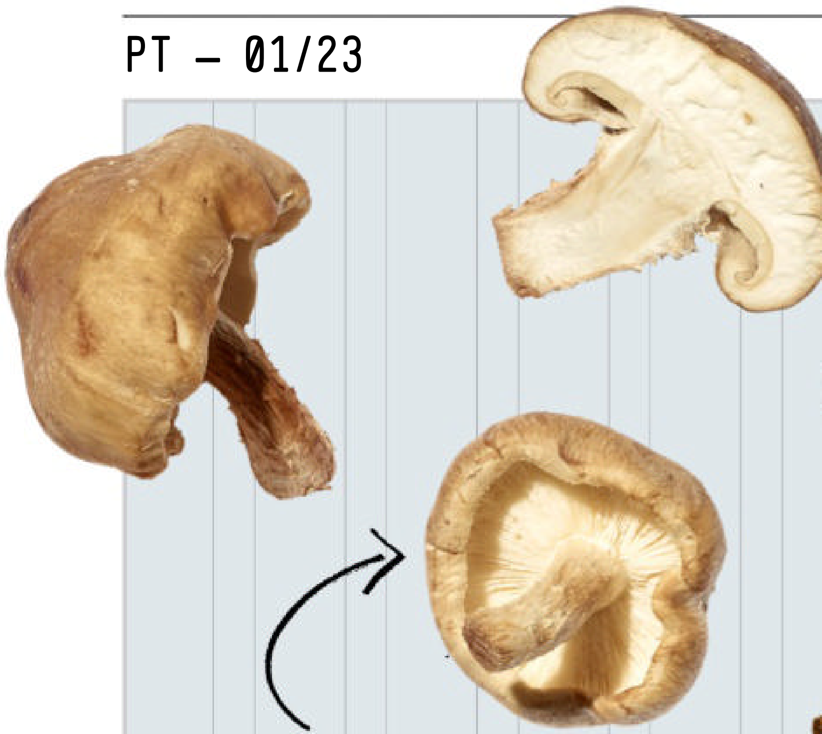
A source of the soluble fibre pectin, apples can help to keep your blood sugar steady and gut microbiome healthy, which has been linked to easier weight loss. They're also a little lower in sugar than many other fruits.



BURN AWAY COLDS

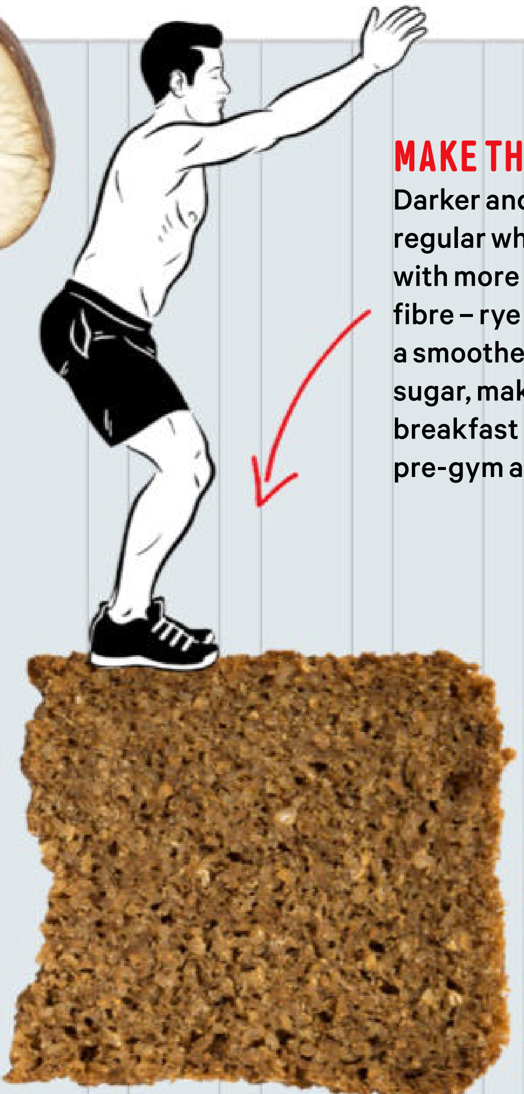
Half a large red pepper meets your RDA of vitamin C. People who are deficient in the vit find it harder to lose fat, plus it fends off energy-sapping colds, keeping you fighting fit to work on your core.

PHOTOGRAPHY: STUDIO 33; DAN MATTHEWS; MICHAEL HEDGE; LOUISA PARRY. ILLUSTRATIONS: BEN MOUNSEY-WOOD



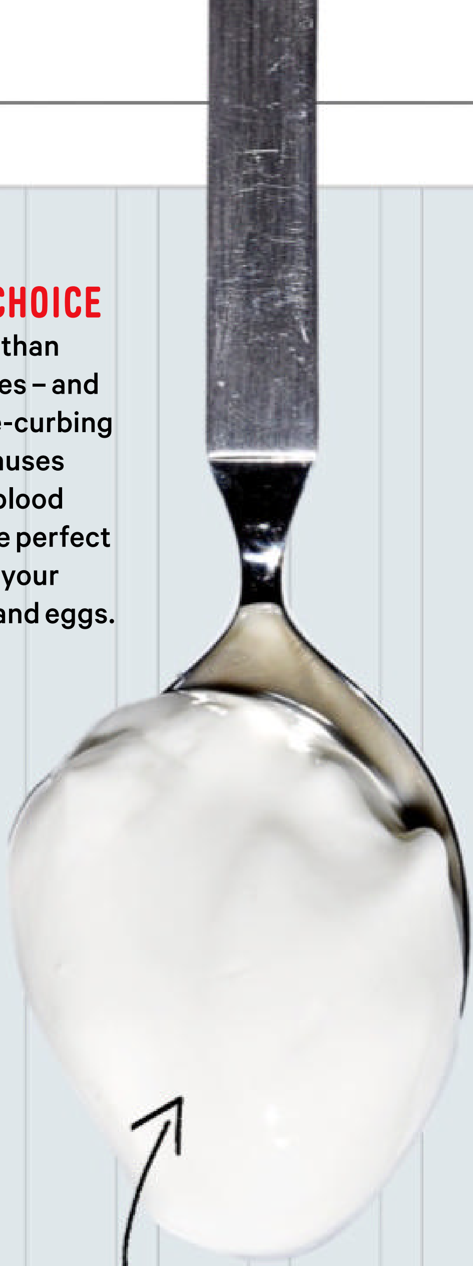
SHROOM TO GROW

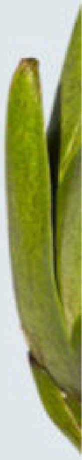
Mushrooms are great for bulking out bakes, risottos and stir-frys without adding much in the way of calories. They also contain hard-to-source vitamin D, which has been linked to increased testosterone production.



MAKE THE RYE CHOICE

Darker and denser than regular wheat loaves – and with more appetite-curbing fibre – rye bread causes a smoother rise in blood sugar, making it the perfect breakfast base for your pre-gym avocado and eggs.





POTS OF GOLD

The perfect quick-fix snack, Greek yoghurt is full of protein and loaded with natural probiotic bacteria, which studies have shown lead to major improvements in digestion. Take care of your gut, inside and out.

97

CALORIES PER 100G FILLET

MATTER OVER MIND

People who regularly eat fish such as sea bass have more grey matter in the areas of the brain that deal with memory and – crucially for your purposes – muscle control. A fine catch for your transformation.

CHASE THE PUMP

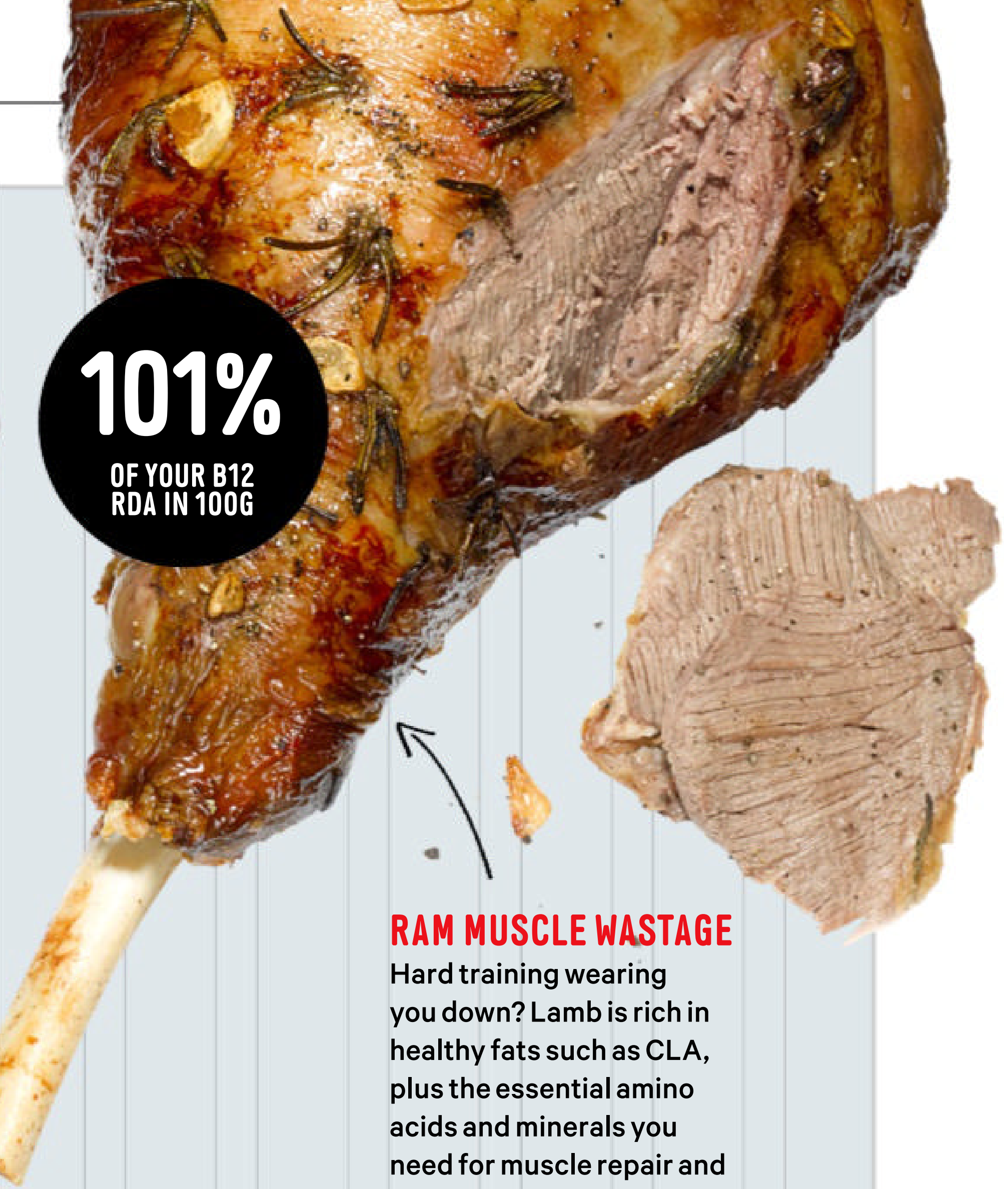
Raspberries are ripe with antioxidants that boost circulation, vital for efficient muscle contractions. Add them to your oats to help you keep up with the demands of your workouts, and make 'the pump' easier to come by.

MORE THAN AN OEUF

A concentrated form of animal protein and fat-soluble vitamins, eating eggs for breakfast is shown to boost weight loss and fullness over carby cereals. Plus, a buttery omelette is more fun than cornflakes.

PICK OF THE BUNCH

Blackberries are nutrient-rich but calorie-light, with particularly high levels of vitamin K. This nutrient plays an important role in bone health and injury healing. Preparation never hurts.



CHOKE OUT HUNGER

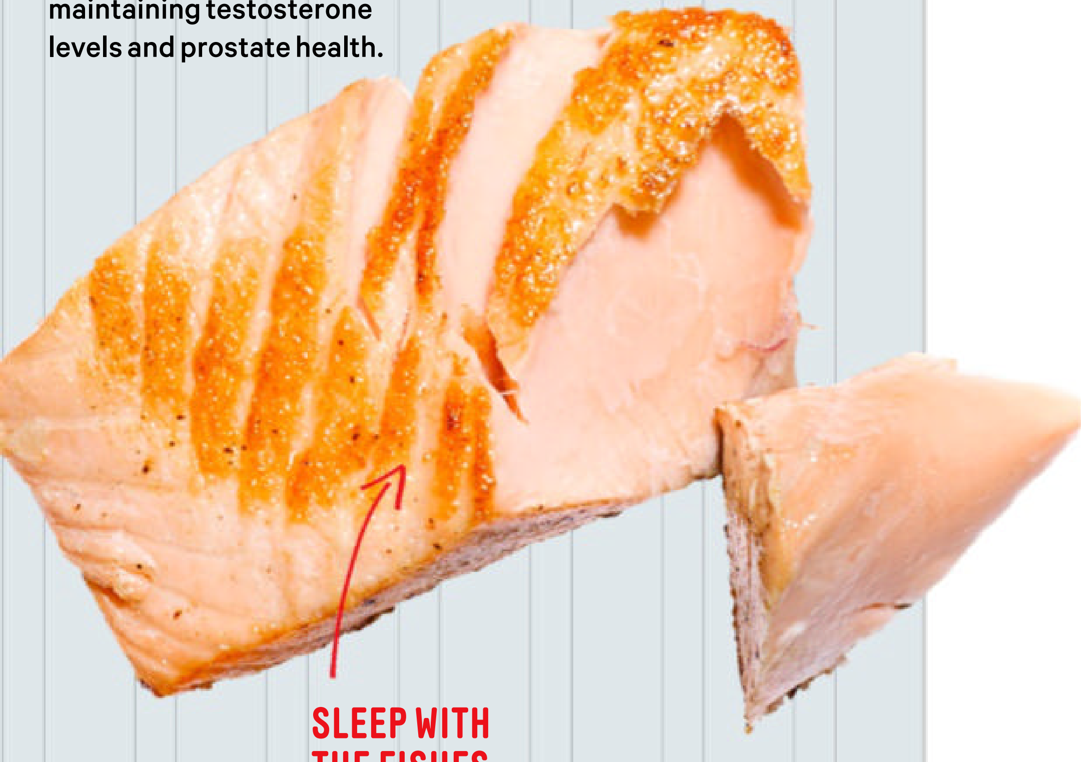
One medium artichoke contains around 7g of fibre, making the plant very low in digestible carbohydrates. Slice, grill and add to your lunchtime salads to improve digestive health and blunt your appetite.

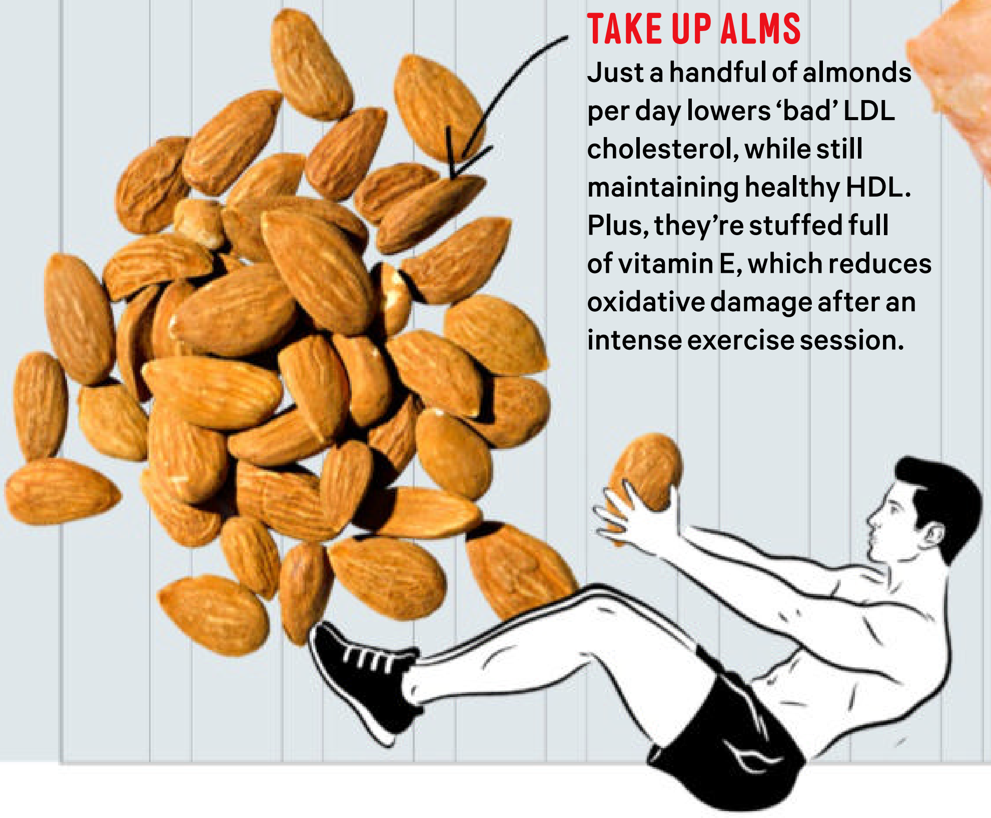
RAM MUSCLE WASTAGE

Hard training wearing you down? Lamb is rich in healthy fats such as CLA, plus the essential amino acids and minerals you need for muscle repair and growth. You'll only lose inches where you want to.

GRAIN AND GAIN

Post-workout carbs are essential to build your abs and enhance recovery. Spelt is similar to wheat, but higher in the mineral zinc, which is a key player in maintaining testosterone levels and prostate health.





TAKE UP ALMS

Just a handful of almonds per day lowers 'bad' LDL cholesterol, while still maintaining healthy HDL. Plus, they're stuffed full of vitamin E, which reduces oxidative damage after an intense exercise session.

SLEEP WITH THE FISHES

Among its many benefits, the omega-3 in salmon helps the body make sleep hormone melatonin. Your muscles repair and grow in the unconscious hours, so proper shut-eye is vital.

Join the Men's Health research panel

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Take part in product tests

Give your views and opinions

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Men'sHealth

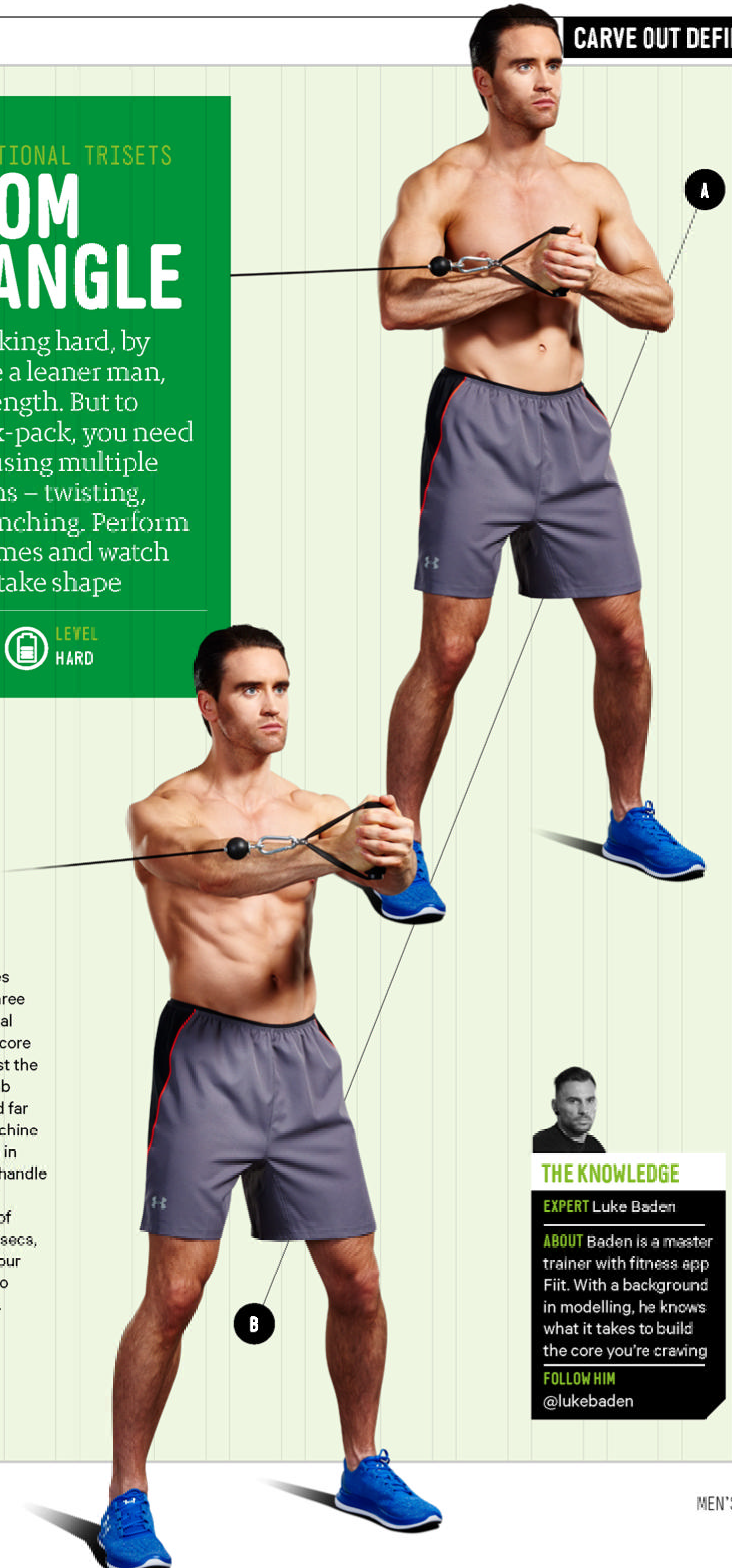
STAGE THREE: FUNCTIONAL TRISETS

~~ABS~~ FROM EVERY ANGLE

If you've been working hard, by now you should be a leaner man, with solid core strength. But to sculpt a Spartan six-pack, you need to target your abs using multiple movement patterns – twisting, stretching and crunching. Perform each triset three times and watch those abs begin to take shape

TOTAL TIME
35-45 MINS

LEVEL
HARD



01a \ PALLOF PRESS

15 REPS EACH SIDE

Each triset comprises – you guessed it – three moves. This rotational movement has your core working hard to resist the pull of the cable. Grab the handle and stand far enough from the machine that you feel tension in the cable. Press the handle from your chest **(A)** straight out in front of you **(B)**. Hold it for 2 secs, then return. Finish your reps and move on. No rest yet, we're afraid.

THE KNOWLEDGE

EXPERT Luke Baden

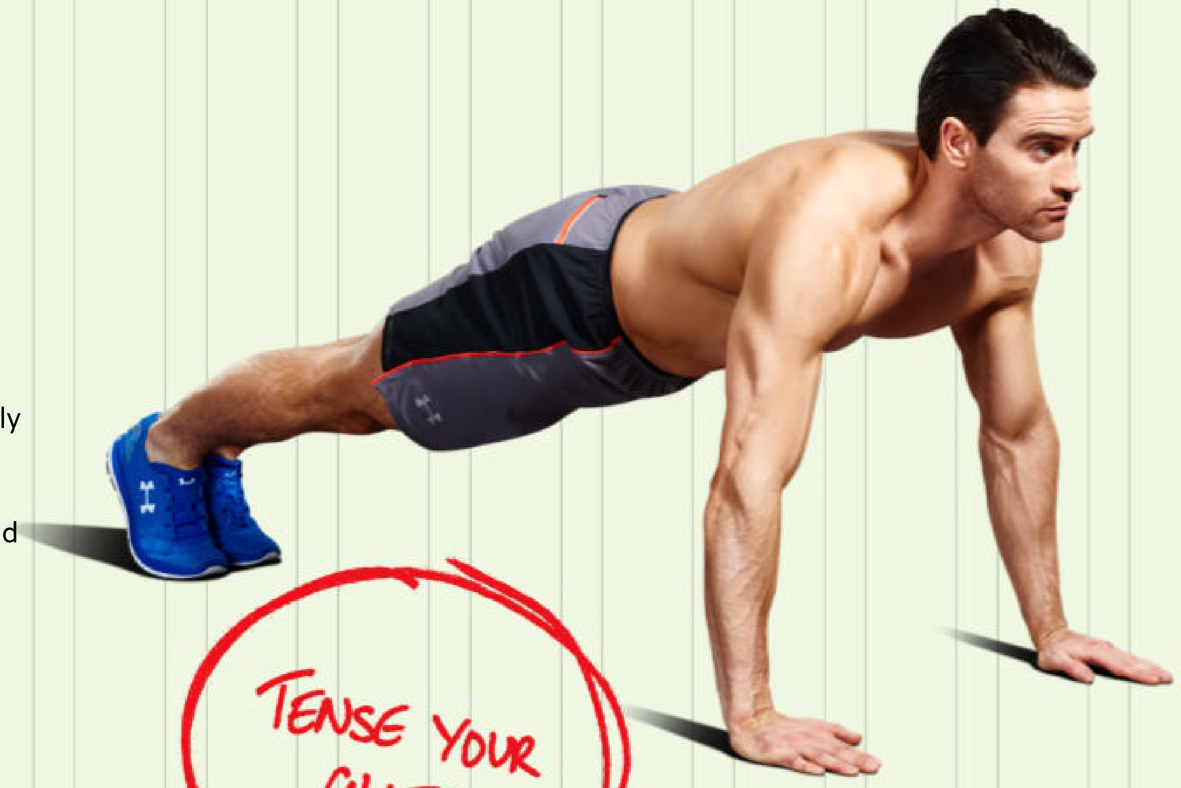
ABOUT Baden is a master trainer with fitness app Fiit. With a background in modelling, he knows what it takes to build the core you're craving

FOLLOW HIM
@lukebaden

01b \ LONG-ARM PLANK

60 SECS

The next part of your triset is an upgrade on the standard forearm plank, strengthening your shoulders and arms. Position yourself in the top stage of a press-up, placing your hands directly under your shoulders and legs straight out behind you. Contract your abs and glutes to keep your body in line from head to heels. Hold for a full minute. Ignore the shaking.



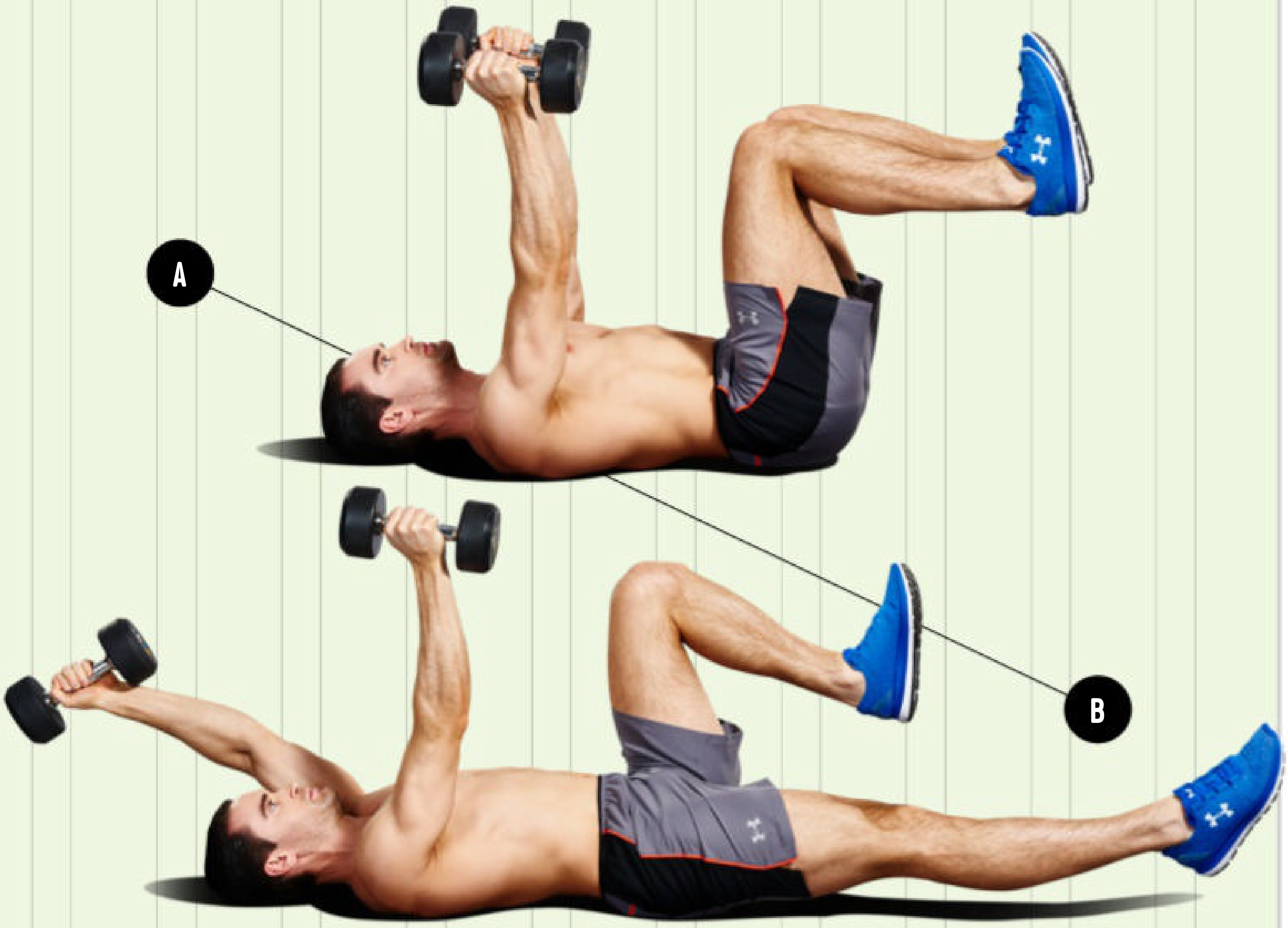
TENSE YOUR GLUTES.

TRISET 1

01c \ WEIGHTED DEADBUG

10 REPS EACH SIDE

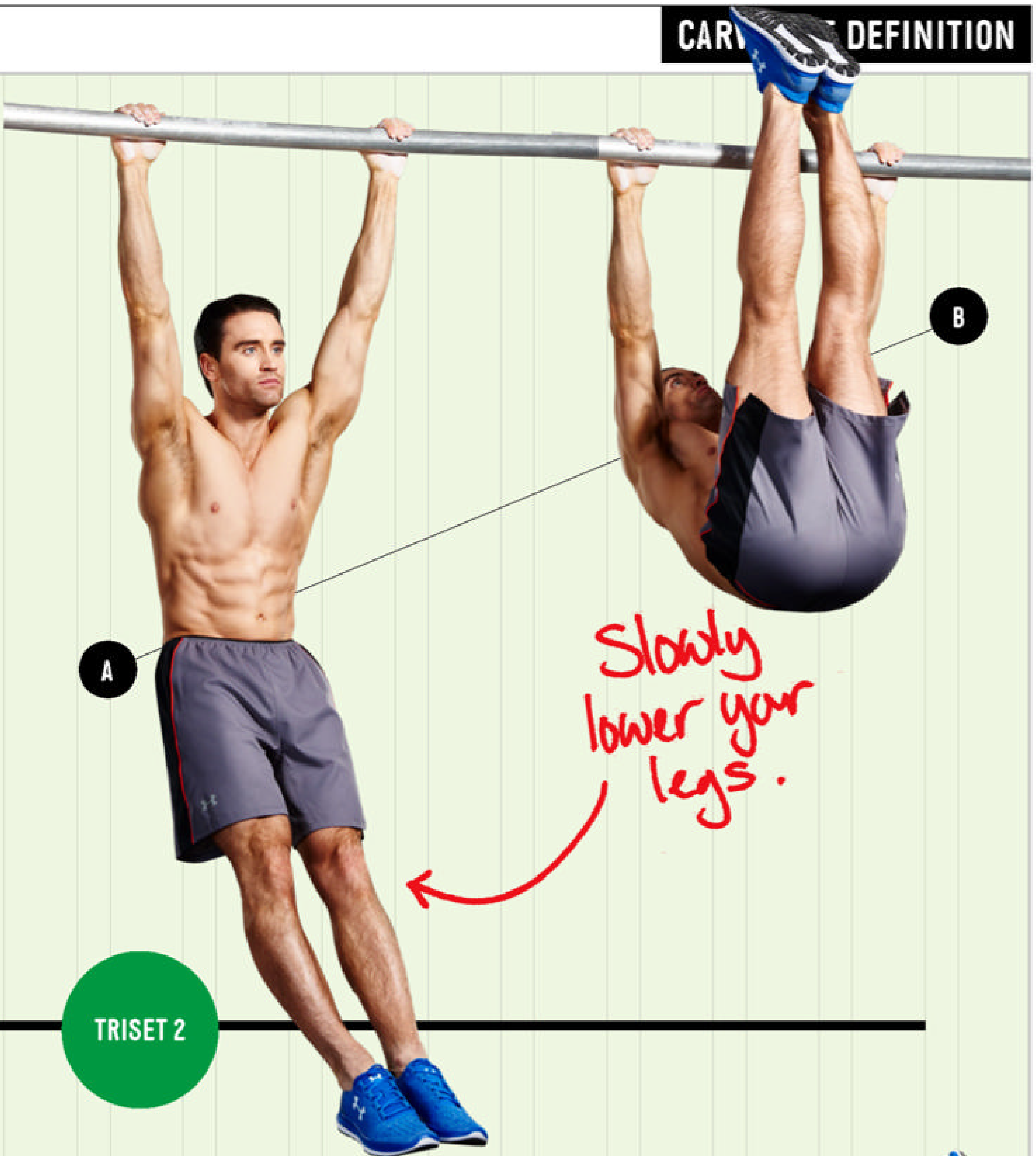
This pilates stretch is now used by strength coaches, as – unlike crunches – deadbugs protect your spine and strengthen your lower back. With knees bent at 90 degrees, hold two dumbbells high **(A)**. Lower your right leg until it's just above the floor, simultaneously lowering your left arm **(B)**. Reps done? Enjoy a 2-min rest before going back to the cables for another two rounds.



02a\ TOES-TO-BAR

8 REPS

This hanging abs move is a true test of your core stability. Grab a pull-up bar with an overhand grip. Create tension in your arms and core by pulling down on the bar as hard as possible **(A)**. Contract your glutes and lift your toes to the bar **(B)**. It's okay to keep a slight bend in your knees. Once your toes reach the bar, slowly lower back down to the start over a 2-sec count.



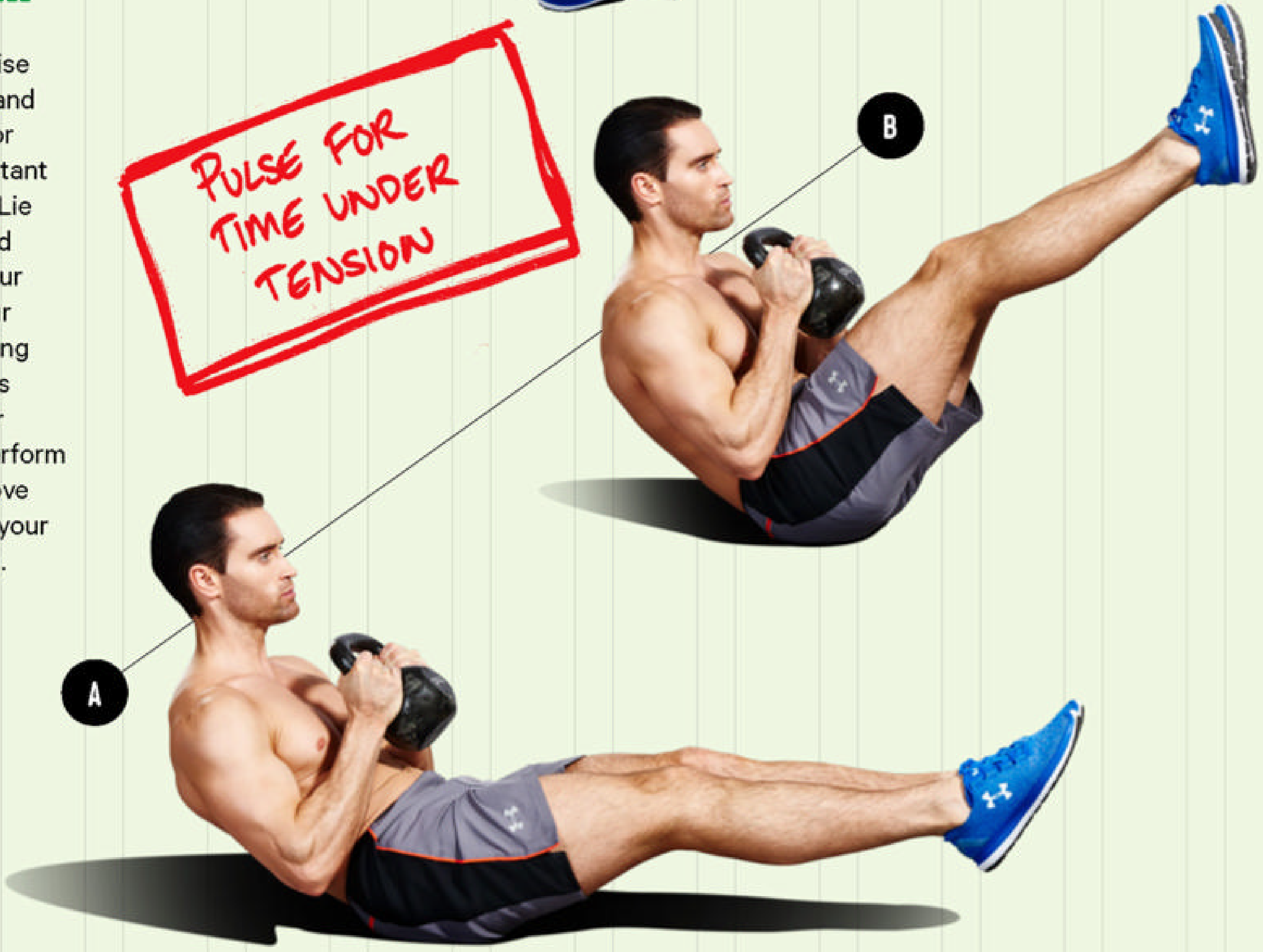
Slowly lower your legs.

TRISET 2

02b\ V-UP WITH KETTLEBELL

12 REPS

The key to this exercise is keeping your legs and shoulders off the floor so you maintain constant tension in your core. Lie on your back and hold the kettlebell with your hands just above your abs **(A)**. Sit up, bringing your knees in towards your chest **(B)**. Lower back down slowly. Perform your 12 reps, then move on to the last part of your triset without resting.

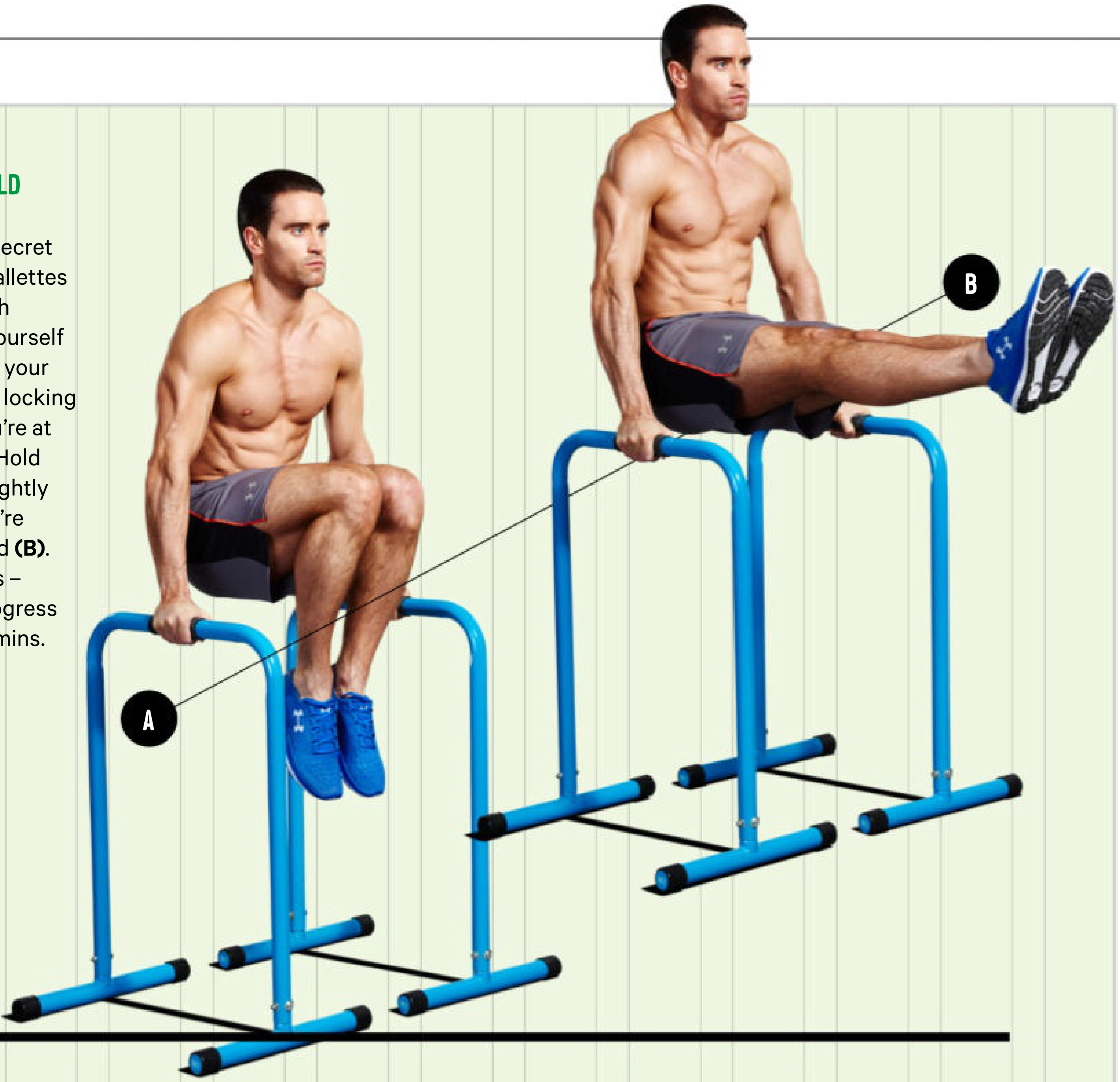


PULSE FOR TIME UNDER TENSION

02c\ L-SIT HOLD

30 SECS

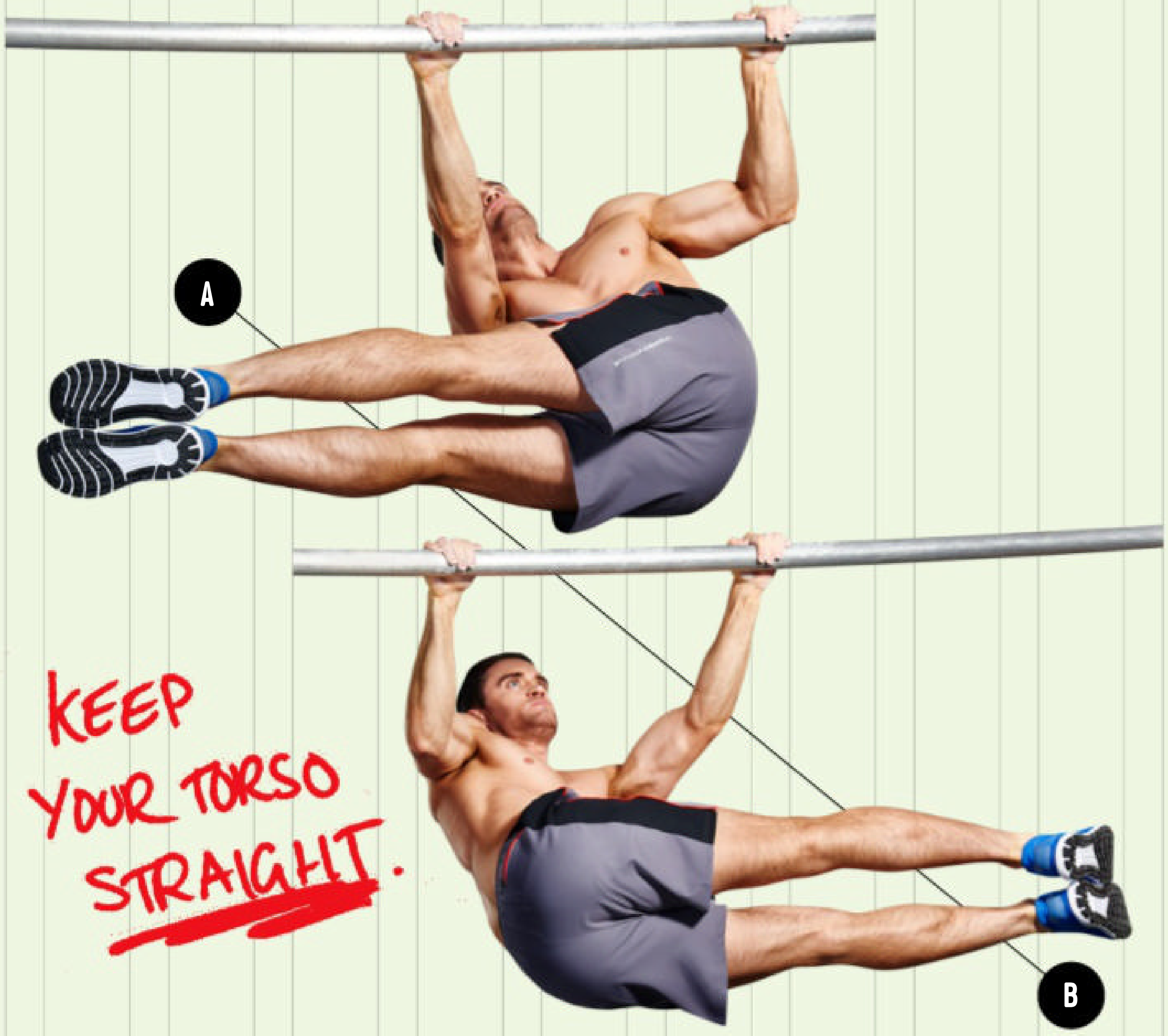
This is a gymnast's secret weapon. Set the parallettes about shoulder-width apart and position yourself between them. Push your body off the ground, locking your elbows as if you're at the top of a dip **(A)**. Hold your legs together tightly and lift them so they're parallel to the ground **(B)**. Now hold for 30 secs – that burn is what progress feels like. Rest for 2 mins.



03a\ WINDSCREEN WIPER

3-6 REPS

There's a reason we've kept the rep count low on this one. It's horribly tough. First, perform a hanging leg raise – overhand grip, legs at 90 degrees with your torso. Then, from here, hold the position and rotate your lower body to the right by bringing your left hip towards your left armpit **(A)**. Now repeat to the other side **(B)**. Just two more exercises to get through after this.

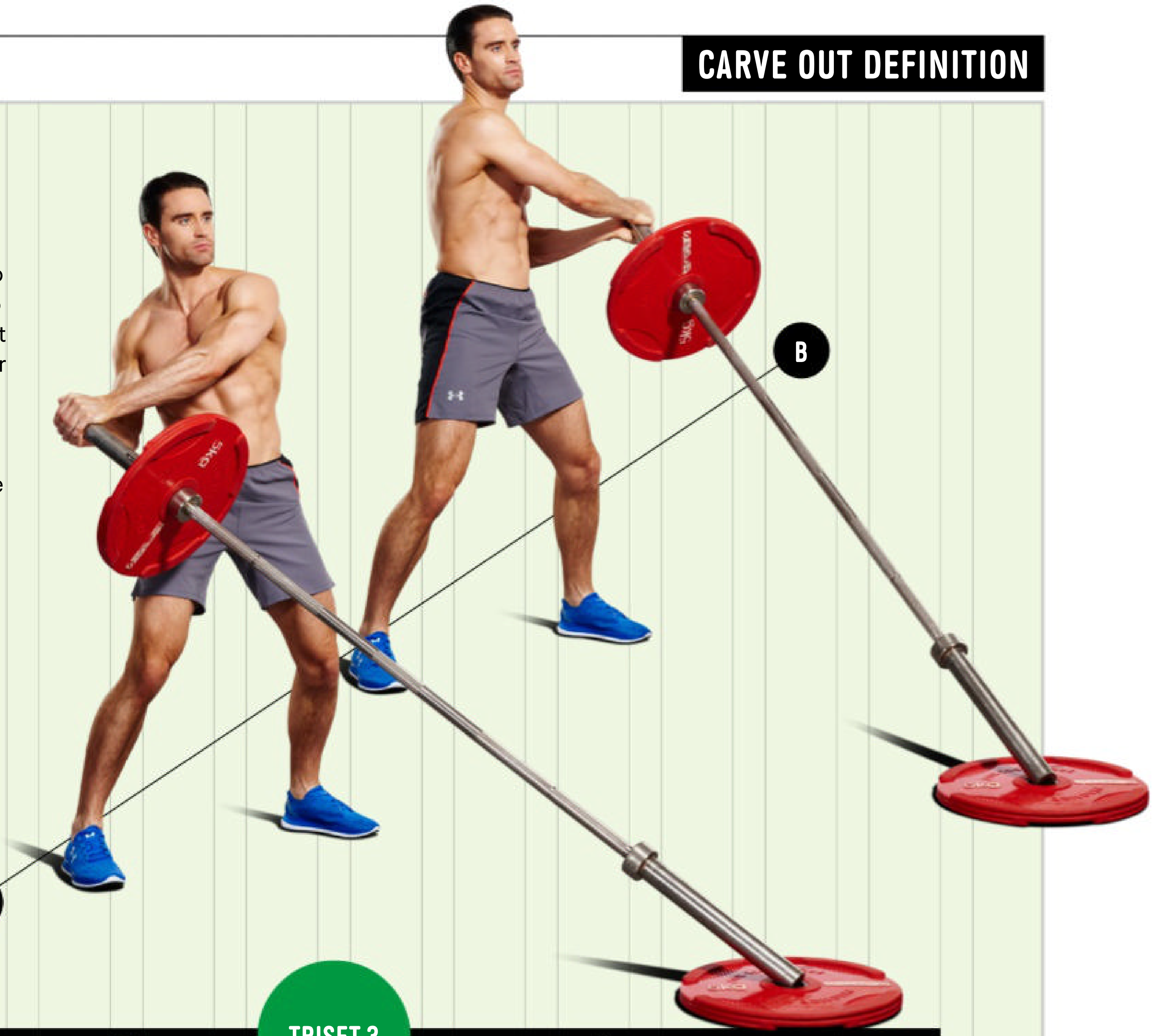


KEEP YOUR TORSO STRAIGHT.

03b \ LANDMINE RAINBOW

8 REPS

This twisting move is one to shout about for its ability to develop your obliques. Start by raising the bar to shoulder height with your arms extended in front of you and stand with feet wider than shoulder-width. Rotate your torso as you twist the barbell down to your right hip, keeping your arms extended **(A)**. Reverse the motion to rotate the weight over to your left hip **(B)**.

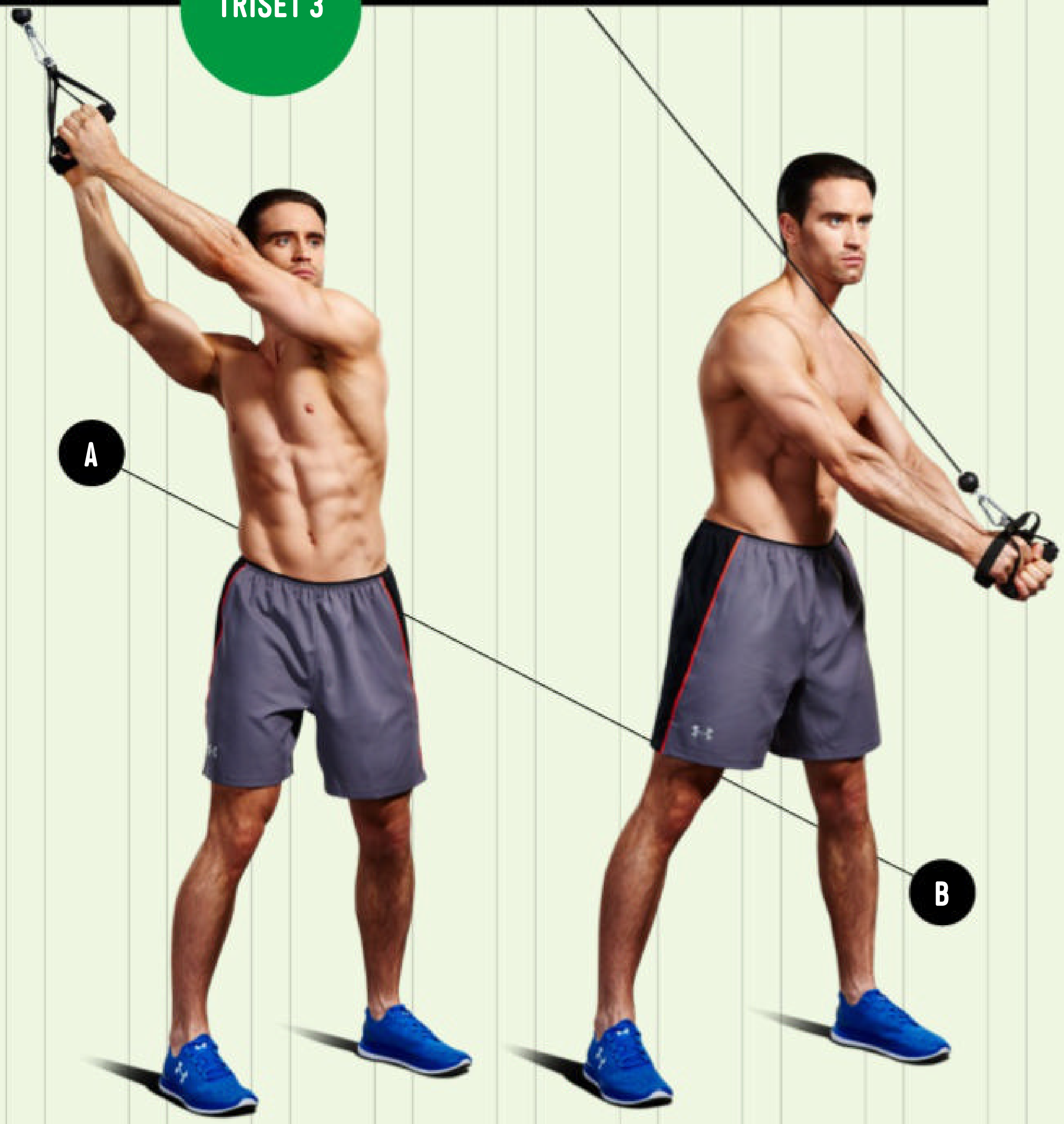


TRISET 3

03c \ CABLE WOODCHOP

12 REPS EACH SIDE

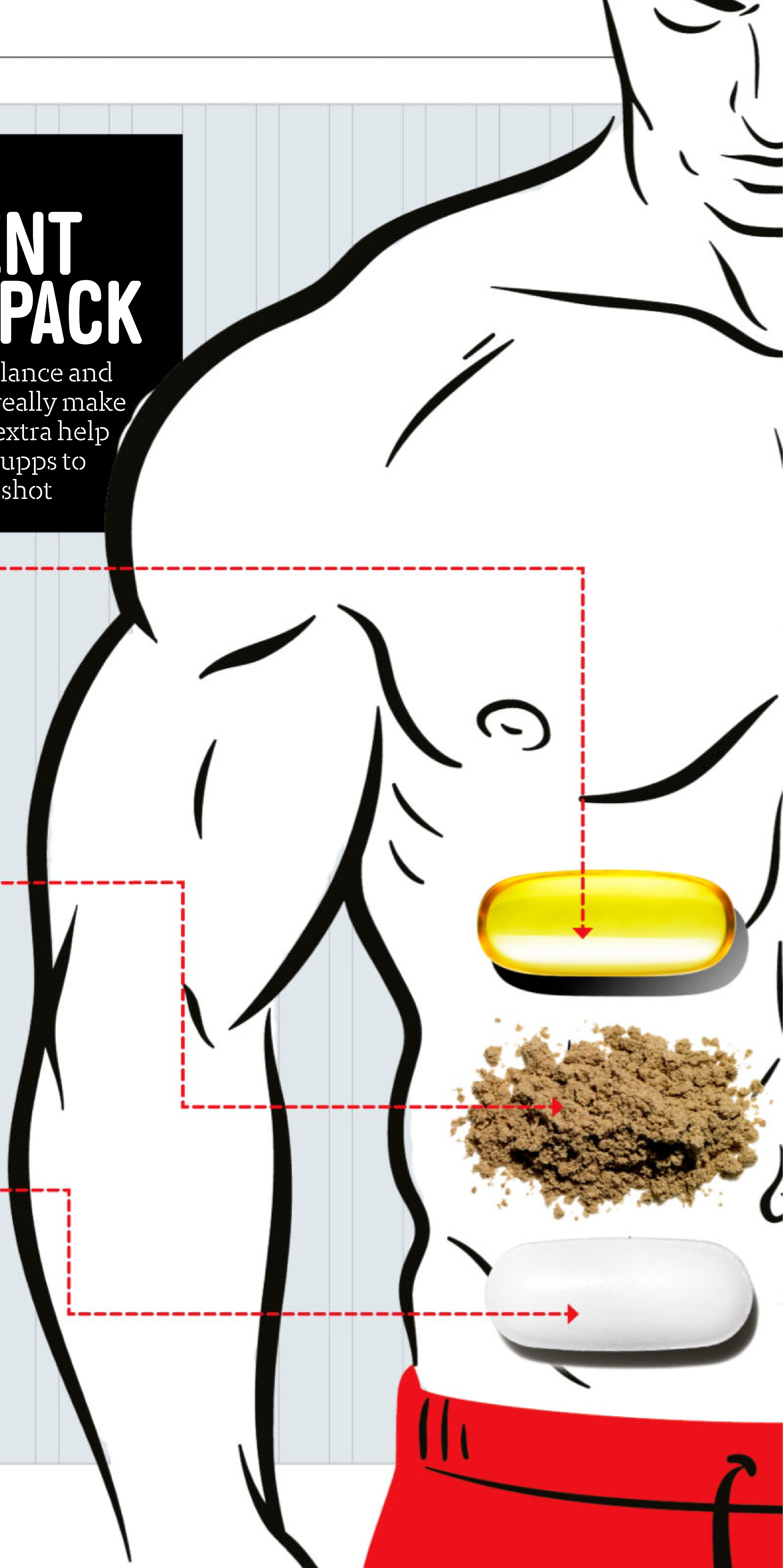
By moving diagonally, you're working both your upper and lower abs. Set the cable to the highest position. With your side to the cable, arms extended **(A)**, explosively pull the handle down to your front knee **(B)**. Rotate your torso and pivot with your back foot. Return, under control. Do 12 reps, rest 2 mins, then go back to the bar for your second round of windscreen wipers.



HELPING HANDFULS

SUPPLEMENT YOUR SIX-PACK

Yes, it's true that calorie balance and proper nutrition are what really make the difference. But a little extra help is no bad thing. Try these supps to give your efforts a booster shot



OMEGA-3 WITH VIT D

TAKE DAILY WITH A MEAL

A dose of these beneficial fatty acids supports heart health and post-training recovery, while maintaining adequate levels of vit D during winter is shown to assist with fat-burning.

Minami MorEPA + Vitamin D3, £41.49 for 60, dolphinfitness.co.uk

PLANT PROTEIN

TAKE AFTER TRAINING

If whey causes digestive issues – or you follow a plant-based diet – look for a low-sugar powder with a blend of proteins, such as hemp, soy, pea and rice. We like Form Nutrition's.

Form Performance Protein, £26 for 520g, formnutrition.com

ZMA

TAKE BEFORE BED

This useful blend of zinc, magnesium and vitamin B6 can help to maintain healthy hormone levels and muscle function while promoting better sleep.

ZMA Capsules, £16.99 for 90, myprotein.com

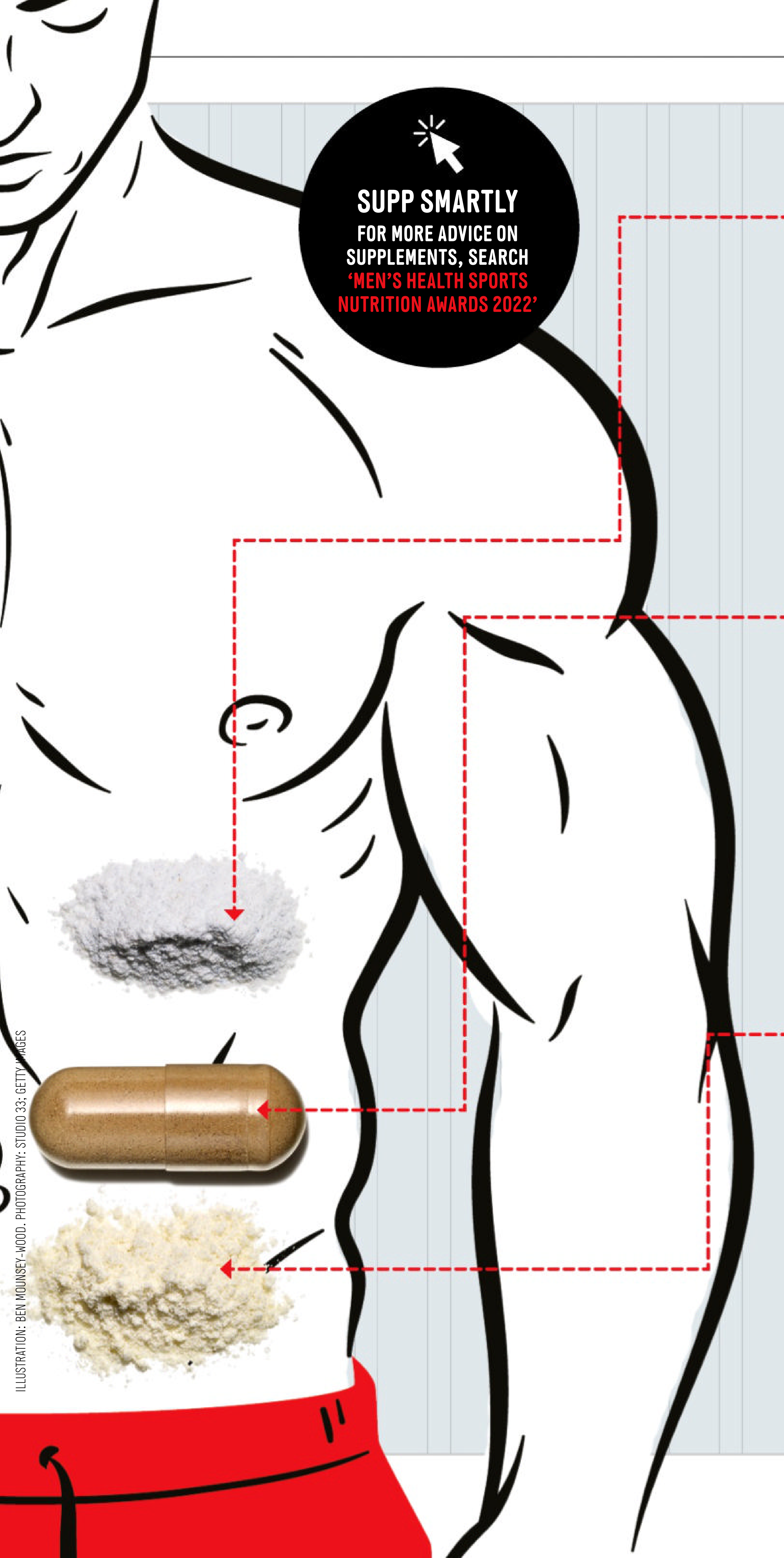


ILLUSTRATION: BEN MOUNSEY-WOOD. PHOTOGRAPHY: STUDIO 33; GETTY IMAGES

SUPP SMARTLY

FOR MORE ADVICE ON SUPPLEMENTS, SEARCH ‘MEN’S HEALTH SPORTS NUTRITION AWARDS 2022’

BCAAS

TAKE DURING WORKOUTS

Losing weight means staying in calorie deficit. Branched-chain amino acids will help reduce muscle loss on a strict diet. The leucine in these acts as an anabolic to signal muscle synthesis.

Essential BCAA 2:1:1 Powder, £25 for 250g, myprotein.com

PROBIOTIC

TAKE DAILY WITH A MEAL

Preliminary studies suggest feeding your gut with beneficial bacteria, as well as the plant fibre inulin, can support and even speed up fat loss. It’s not a replacement for a fibre-rich diet, but it might just give you that extra 10%.

Veganbiotic, £17.99 for 60 capsules, bulk.com/uk

OATS & WHEY

TAKE POST-WORKOUT

The hardest part of building muscle while reducing body fat is sticking to a healthy meal plan. Oats provide a slow-digesting, sustained energy source, curbing your appetite to limit mindless snacking.

Protein Porridge Mix, £19.99 for 1kg, bulk.com/uk

STAGE FOUR: THE ENDGAME

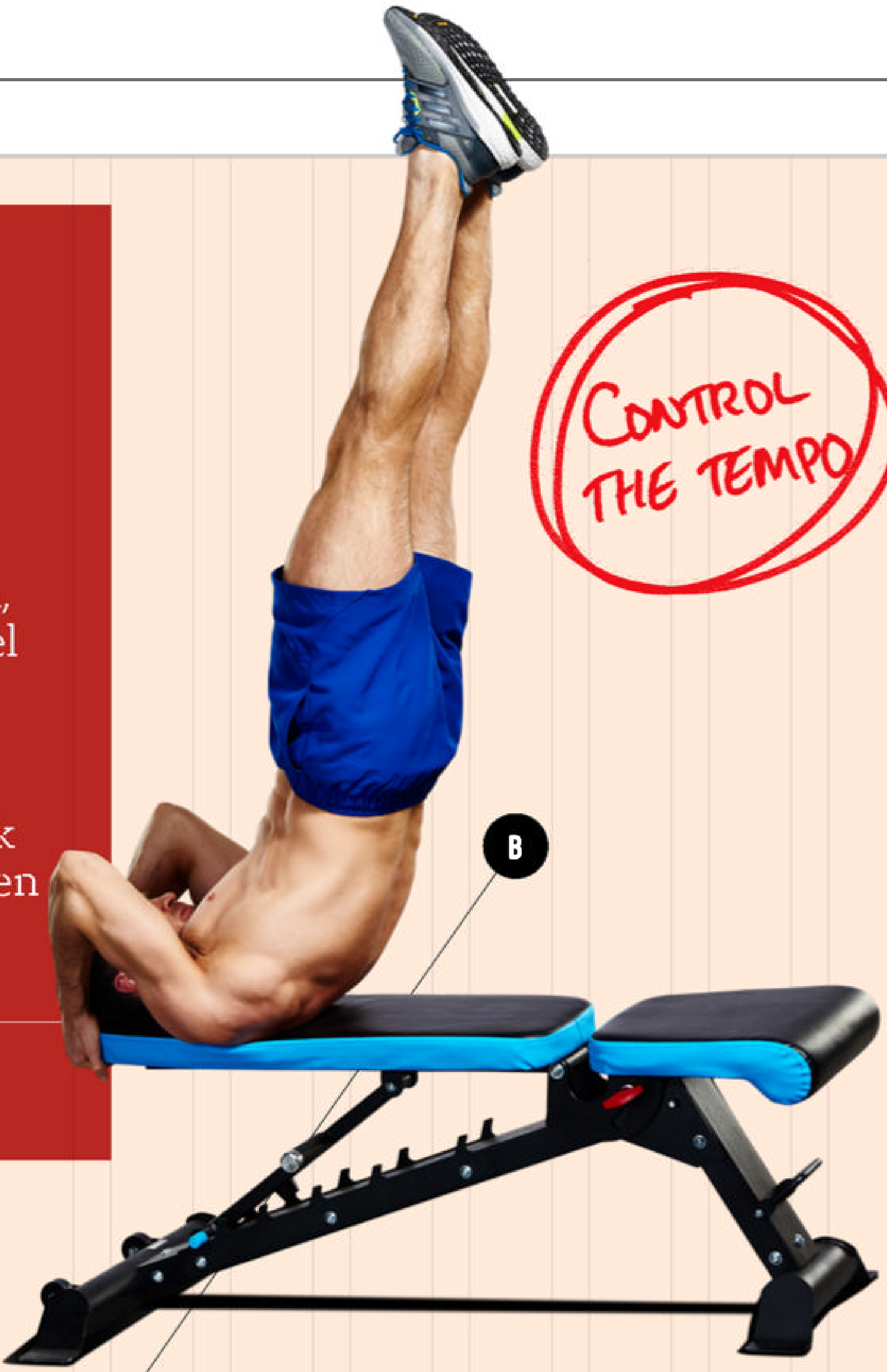
RETURN TO SLENDER

By this point in the 12-week plan, you should be able to see and feel the difference. Your next move is to elevate those abs to athlete standard. This workout will test your limits by asking you to work to failure. Rest for 60 secs between sets or supersets and repeat the full session twice each week

TOTAL TIME 45-50 MINS

LEVEL ELITE

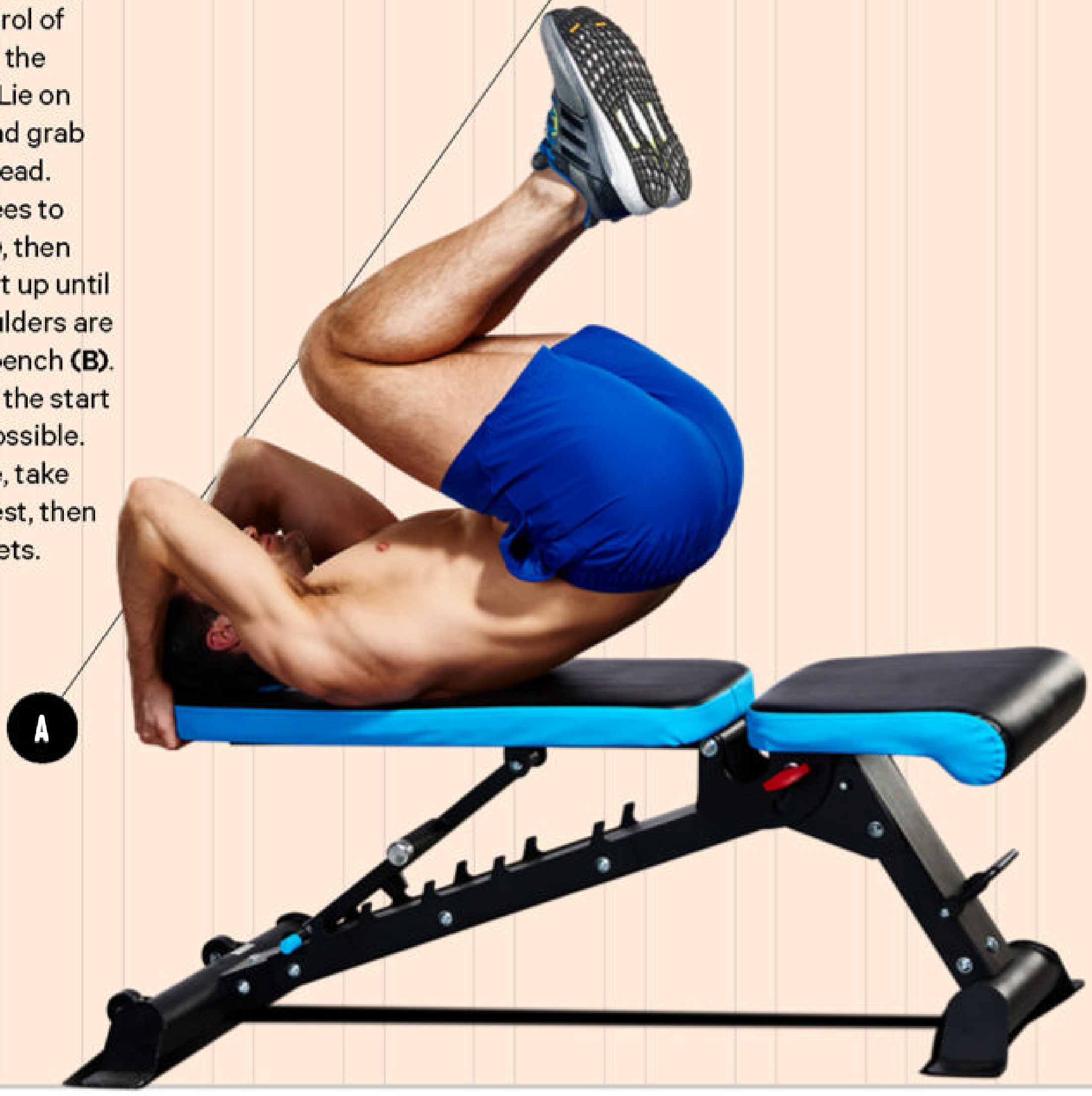
CONTROL THE TEMPO



01\ DRAGON LOWER

3 SETS TO FAILURE

Build a ferocious midsection by taking complete control of your core with the dragon lower. Lie on a flat bench and grab the end, overhead. Bring your knees to your chest **(A)**, then shoot your feet up until only your shoulders are touching the bench **(B)**. Lower back to the start as slowly as possible. Work to failure, take your 60-sec rest, then do two more sets.



THE KNOWLEDGE

EXPERT Sean Lerwill

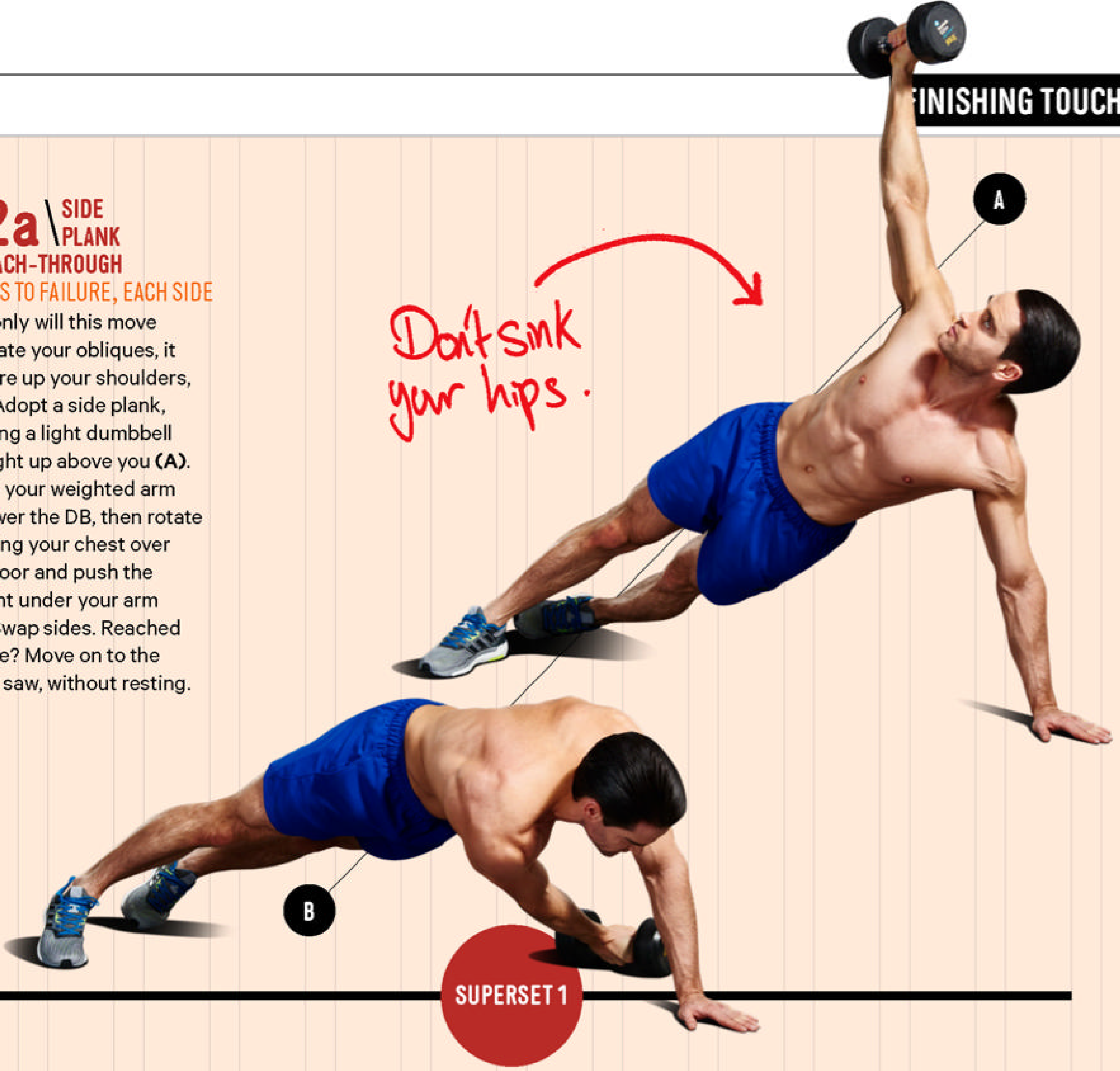
ABOUT Lerwill's Royal Marines background – and cover-model body – have given him the knowledge to refine your six-pack

FOLLOW HIM @seanlerwill

02a \ SIDE PLANK & REACH-THROUGH

3 SETS TO FAILURE, EACH SIDE

Not only will this move activate your obliques, it will fire up your shoulders, too. Adopt a side plank, holding a light dumbbell straight up above you **(A)**. Bend your weighted arm to lower the DB, then rotate to bring your chest over the floor and push the weight under your arm **(B)**. Swap sides. Reached failure? Move on to the body saw, without resting.

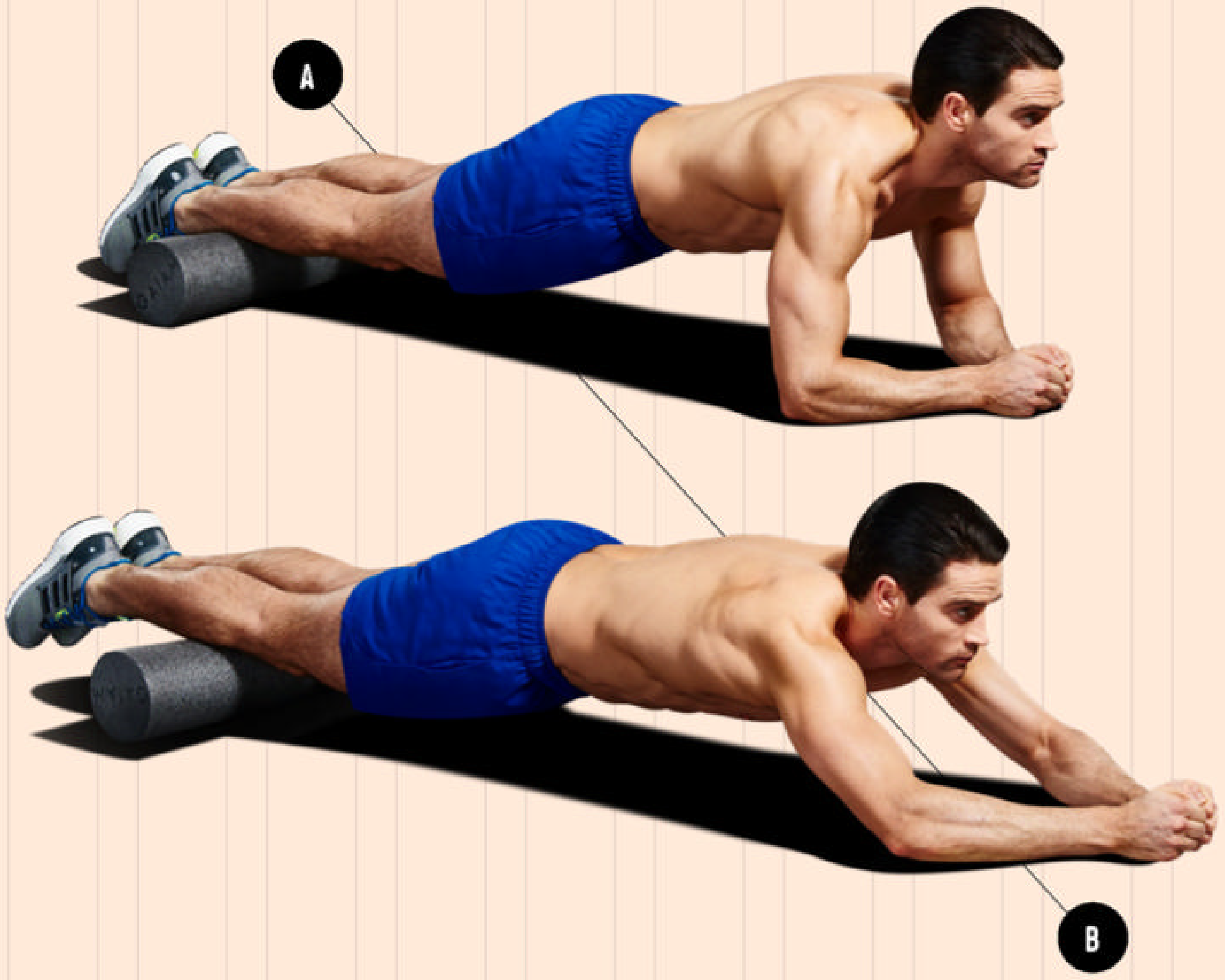


SUPERSET 1

02b \ FOAM-ROLLER BODY SAW

3 SETS TO FAILURE

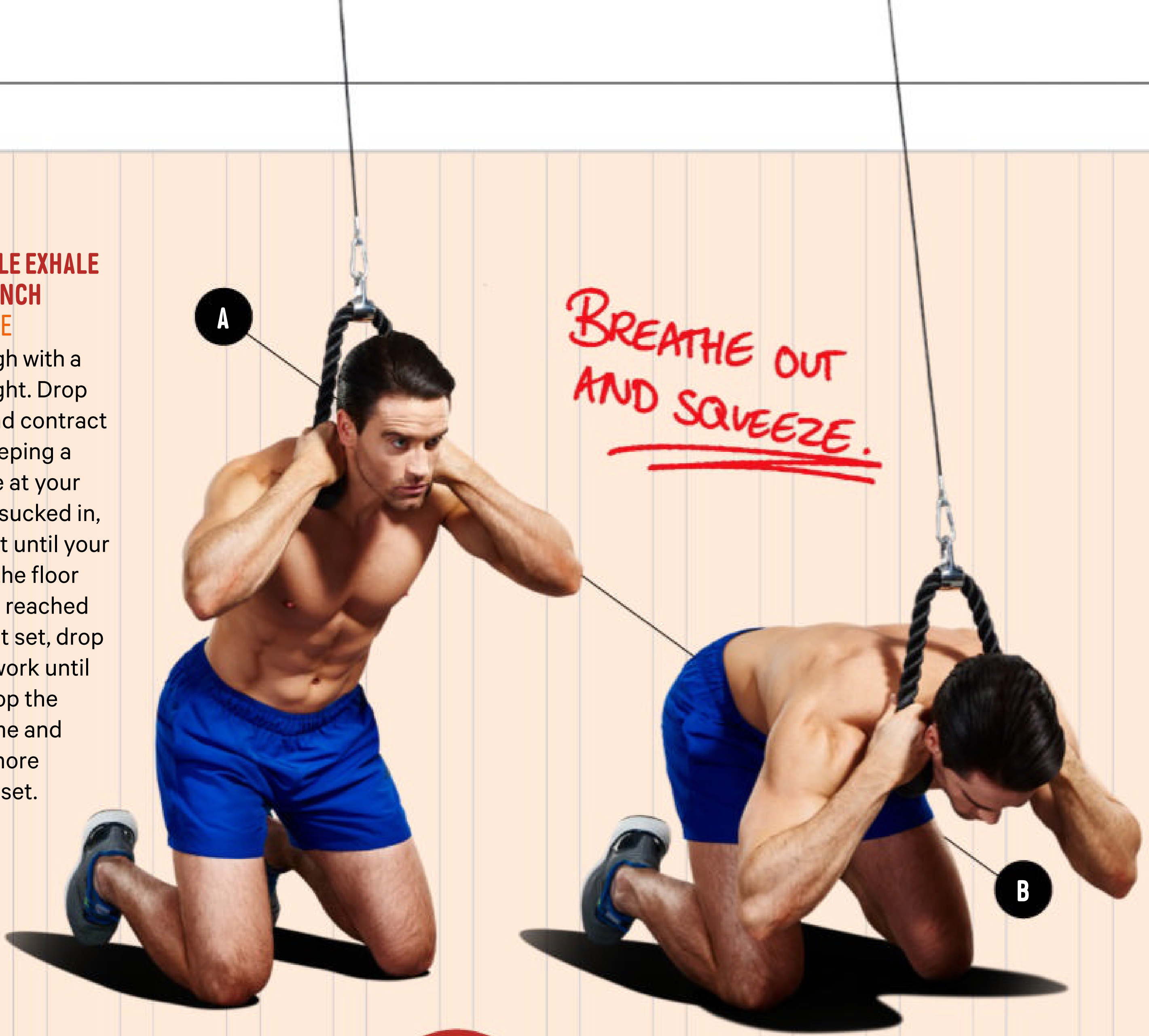
Foam rolling is usually reserved for recovery sessions, but you'll be using it to stretch your six-pack as your core works to balance your body. Adopt a plank position, feet on the roller **(A)**. Start with your elbows below your shoulders, then drive into your forearms to push yourself back **(B)**. Extend as far as you can, then return. Work to failure, rest, then return to the side plank.



03a \ CABLE EXHALE CRUNCH

3 SETS TO FAILURE

Set the pulley high with a challenging weight. Drop to your knees and contract your abs **(A)**. Keeping a 90-degree angle at your knees, stomach sucked in, bend at the waist until your forehead nears the floor **(B)**. Once you've reached failure on the last set, drop the weight and work until failure again. Drop the weight a final time and push out a few more reps. That's one set.



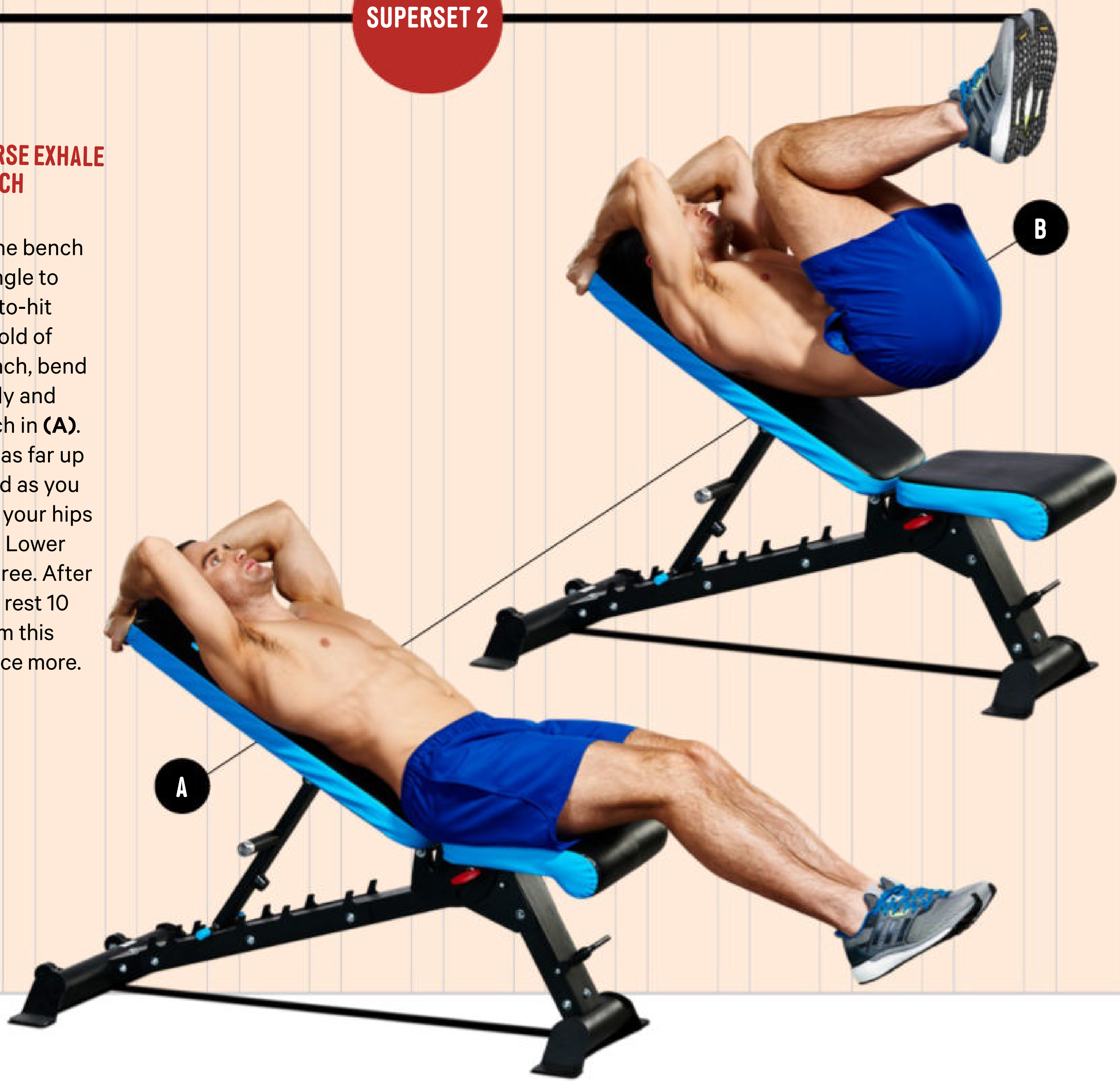
Breathe out and squeeze.

SUPERSET 2

03b \ REVERSE EXHALE CRUNCH

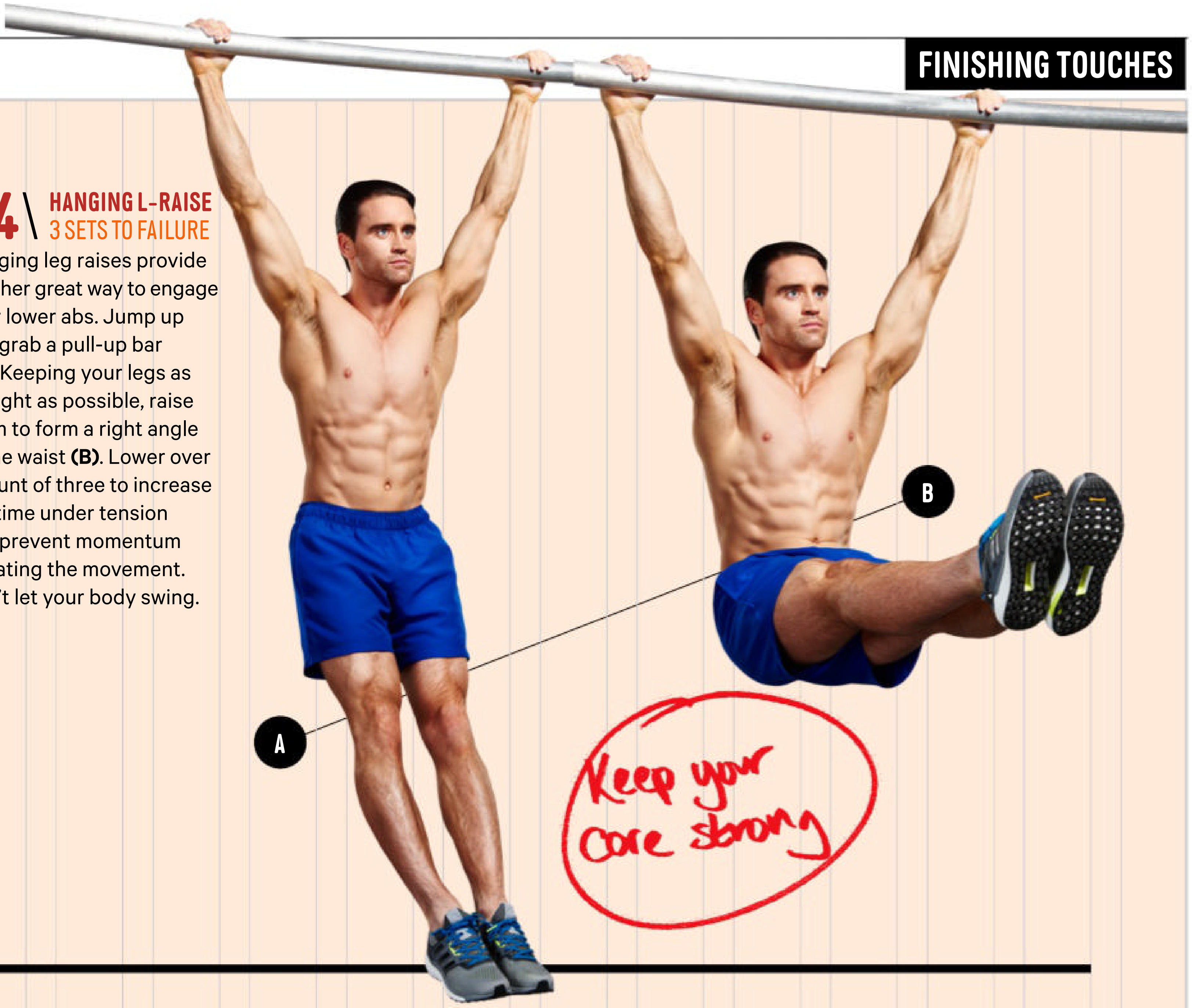
3 SETS TO FAILURE

No rest yet. Set the bench to a 45-degree angle to target your hard-to-hit lower abs. Take hold of the top of the bench, bend your knees slightly and suck your stomach in **(A)**. Bring your knees as far up towards your head as you can, aiming to lift your hips off the bench **(B)**. Lower over a count of three. After the last superset, rest 10 secs, then perform this move to failure once more.



04\ HANGING L-RAISE
3 SETS TO FAILURE

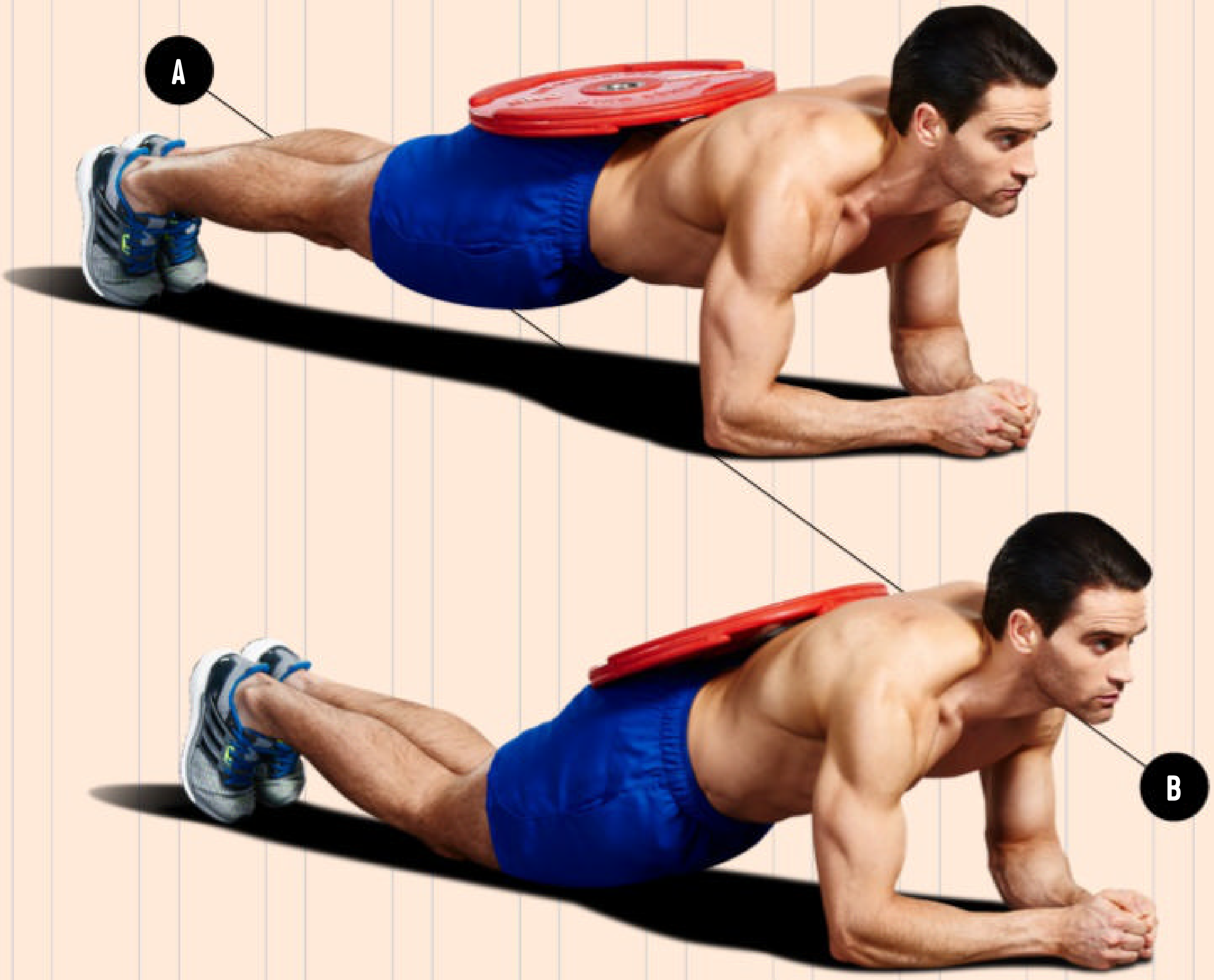
Hanging leg raises provide another great way to engage your lower abs. Jump up and grab a pull-up bar **(A)**. Keeping your legs as straight as possible, raise them to form a right angle at the waist **(B)**. Lower over a count of three to increase the time under tension and prevent momentum dictating the movement. Don't let your body swing.



Keep your
core strong

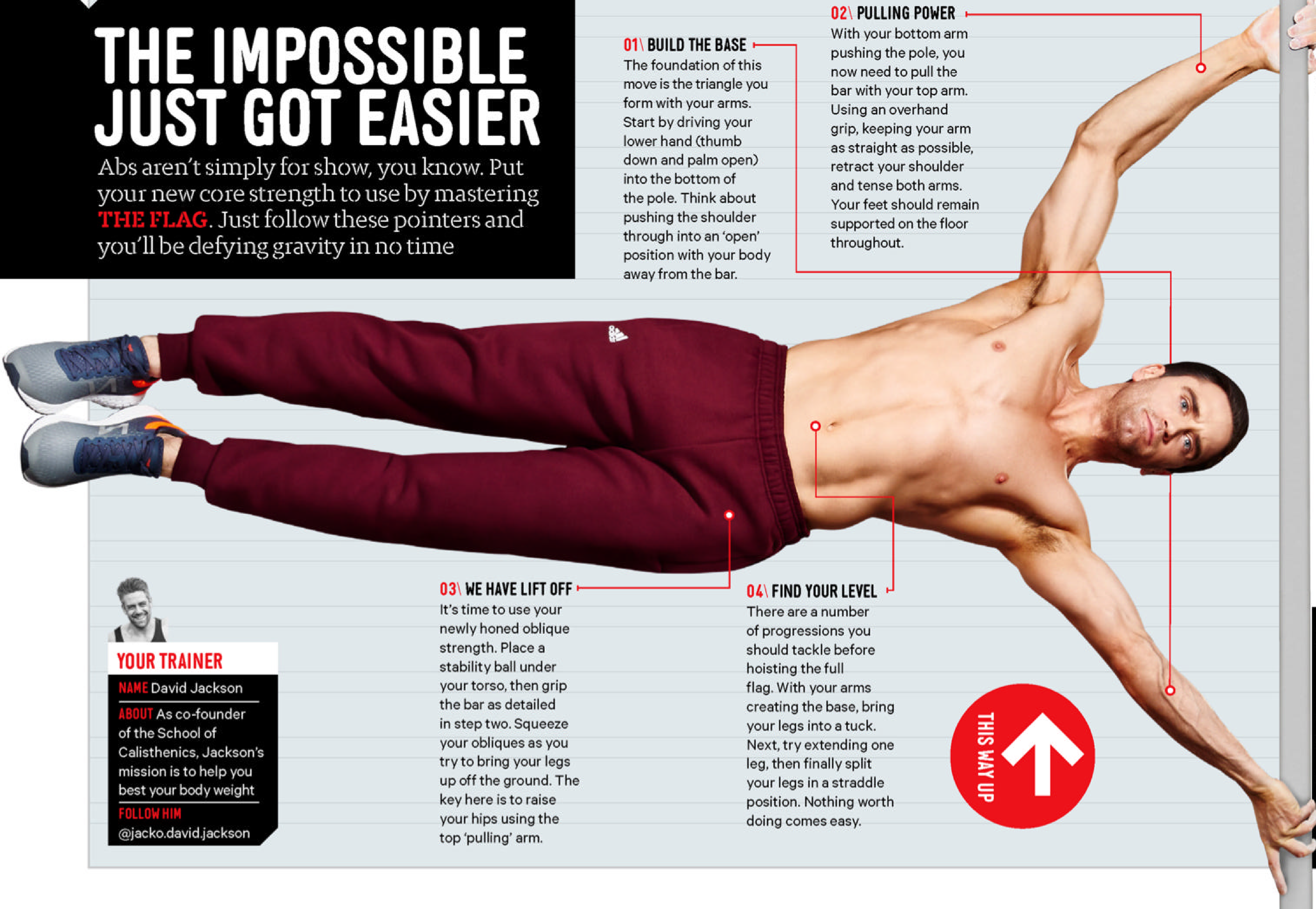
05\ TABATA WEIGHTED PLANK
8 SETS TO FAILURE

Just as when you're working any other body part, adding weight to an abs move will recruit more muscle fibres, increasing growth. Using a 5kg plate, adopt a plank position with the weight across your glutes and lower back. Brace your core and hold for 20 secs **(A)**, then lower to your knees for 10 secs **(B)**. Repeat eight times, then treat your new set of abs to a well-earned break.



THE IMPOSSIBLE JUST GOT EASIER

Abs aren't simply for show, you know. Put your new core strength to use by mastering **THE FLAG**. Just follow these pointers and you'll be defying gravity in no time



01\ BUILD THE BASE

The foundation of this move is the triangle you form with your arms. Start by driving your lower hand (thumb down and palm open) into the bottom of the pole. Think about pushing the shoulder through into an 'open' position with your body away from the bar.

02\ PULLING POWER

With your bottom arm pushing the pole, you now need to pull the bar with your top arm. Using an overhand grip, keeping your arm as straight as possible, retract your shoulder and tense both arms. Your feet should remain supported on the floor throughout.

03\ WE HAVE LIFT OFF

It's time to use your newly honed oblique strength. Place a stability ball under your torso, then grip the bar as detailed in step two. Squeeze your obliques as you try to bring your legs up off the ground. The key here is to raise your hips using the top 'pulling' arm.

04\ FIND YOUR LEVEL

There are a number of progressions you should tackle before hoisting the full flag. With your arms creating the base, bring your legs into a tuck. Next, try extending one leg, then finally split your legs in a straddle position. Nothing worth doing comes easy.

YOUR TRAINER

NAME David Jackson

ABOUT As co-founder of the School of Calisthenics, Jackson's mission is to help you best your body weight

FOLLOW HIM @jacko.david.jackson

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